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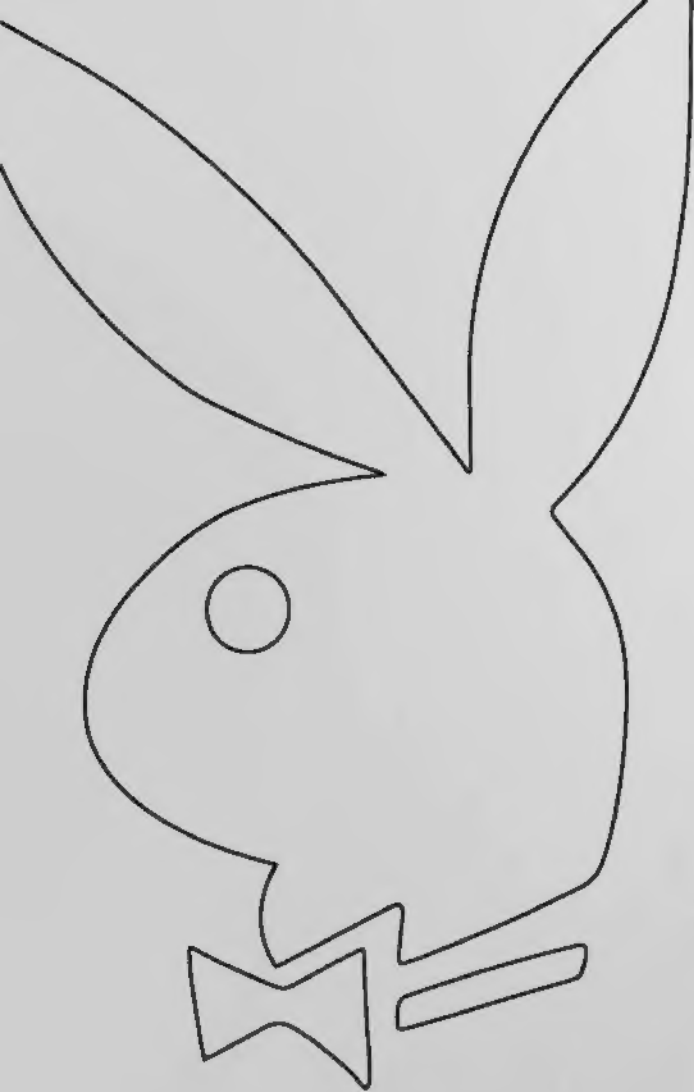
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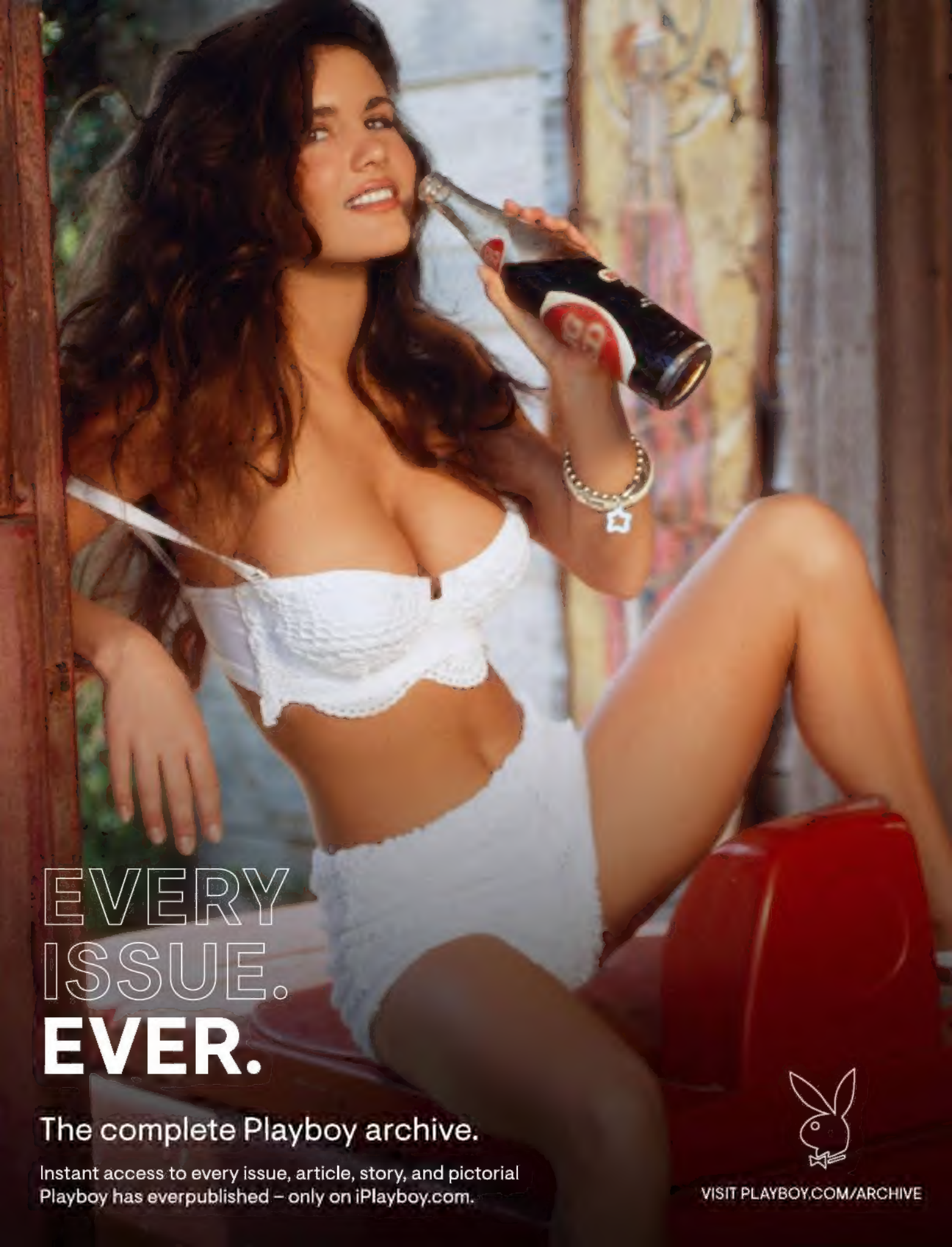
**JORDAN
FIRSTMAN**
THE SEXY
IMPRESSION
CHAMELEON

**NO
FILTER**
LOLA KIRKE
SPEAKS
HER MIND









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Illustrations **Toon53 Productions**
Motoring Editor **John Page**
Senior Photo Editor **Luba V Nel**

ADVERTISING SALES **pieter@dhsmedia.co.za**

for more information

PHONE: +27 10 006 0051
MAIL: PO Box 71450, Bryanston, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2021
ADDRESS: First Floor Block 6 Fourways Office Park, Cnr Roos Street & Fourways Boulevard, 2191
EMAIL: info@dhsmedia.co.za
WEB: www.playboymagaaustralia.com
FACEBOOK: facebook.com/Playboy-Australia
INSTAGRAM: [playboy_australia](https://instagram.com/playboy_australia)

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Trump's Karens Are Here to Stay

Conservative white women's capacity for paradoxical thinking and penchant for victimhood create the perfect storm for buying into Trumpist ideology

BY KELSEY EISEN
PHOTO BY SHUTTERSTOCK

GOD
BLESS
AMERICA!



More white women voted for Donald Trump in 2020 than in 2016. Optimistic liberals had thought that, just maybe, the sexual assault allegations, the refusal to condemn white supremacy, the children in cages and the profound mishandling of the pandemic would cost Trump some white-female support. As someone who has known many conservative white women, I was not surprised to see the opposite occur.

Conservative women have historically been viewed as simplistically family-oriented voters: They're pro-cop because they're pro-safe neighborhoods, pro-life because they're pro-family values. However, these assumptions are merely manifestations of the racist, insidious myth of the inherent goodness and purity of the American white woman. Consider the insurrection on January 6. Images of the violent riot that killed five people are replete with angry, white female faces. These women clearly cannot be dismissed as simply mild-mannered housewives manipulated into supporting Trump out of concern for their families, or somehow ignorant of or indifferent to the profound heartlessness of conservative policy—they are clearly in active, militant support of it.

From a young age, most American women are well aware that their safety is dependent on being acceptable to men.

So how did we go from the Phyllis Schlafly model of the conservative white woman—all prim cardigans and simpering family values—to violently storming a federal building? The short answer is that Trump capitalized on the existing rage of conservative white women in a way that had never been done before. Trump took the comparatively subtle ways conservatives provide scapegoats (such as dog-whistle racial messaging) and subtracted any nuance by completely detaching from reality and going full-on conspiracy theorist.

This begs another question: Why were conservative women so ready to embrace these insane conspiracy theories (such as those pushed by QAnon) that now define Trumpism?

To answer this, we must understand how these women can be primed from a young age to do just that. Consider how conservative women routinely vote against their own self-interest, such as in the 1970s when Schlafly and her supporters defeated the Equal Rights Amendment, a law that would have codified constitutional protection against sex-based discrimination. The conservative woman is historically defined by ideological hypocrisy: She is pro-life, but pro-death penalty and anti-BLM; pro-family but pro-separating families at the border; pro-community safety but anti-gun control.

Misogyny is clearly baked into the tradition-obsessed ideology of American conservatism; consider its emphasis on women's traditional roles or its placement of unborn fetuses' rights above existing women's. Under conservative thought, women are dehumanized as a matter of course. The conservative woman must constantly work to reconcile the paradox of her support of these ideologies. So why do it?

Feminist theorist Andrea Dworkin wrote extensively about right-wing women and their willing participation in a system that openly oppresses them. Dworkin identified self-preservation as the first link in the chain that leads to wholesale support of self-oppression. In an overwhelmingly patriarchal society, and particularly in red areas, conformity is



safety. From a young age, most American women are well aware that their safety is dependent on being acceptable to men: Men are the lawmakers, the most dangerous strangers, the visible faces of power at the highest levels

When a girl can be sent home from school for wearing clothes that make the boys (or male teachers) feel a certain way, she gets the message loud and clear. Her survival is dependent on not provoking those in power. Conformity may be unpleasant, but there's a forever lurking "something worse" that could happen if she doesn't conform (for example, what it is implied the boys will do if she doesn't change into a longer skirt). Under patriarchy, the experience of female childhood is one long process of aversion therapy aimed at discouraging transgressions of the rigid boundaries defining appropriate female behavior

This is how conservative white women can be so easily manipulated by fear: They've always been afraid. They've seen transgressors punished, victim-blamed and slut-shamed. To lose male approval is to lose safety, their potential future as a wife or mother. To rebel against this reality is to reject the foundation upon which their lives have been built. And if this system is not challenged early, doing so later in life can be simply too destabilizing.

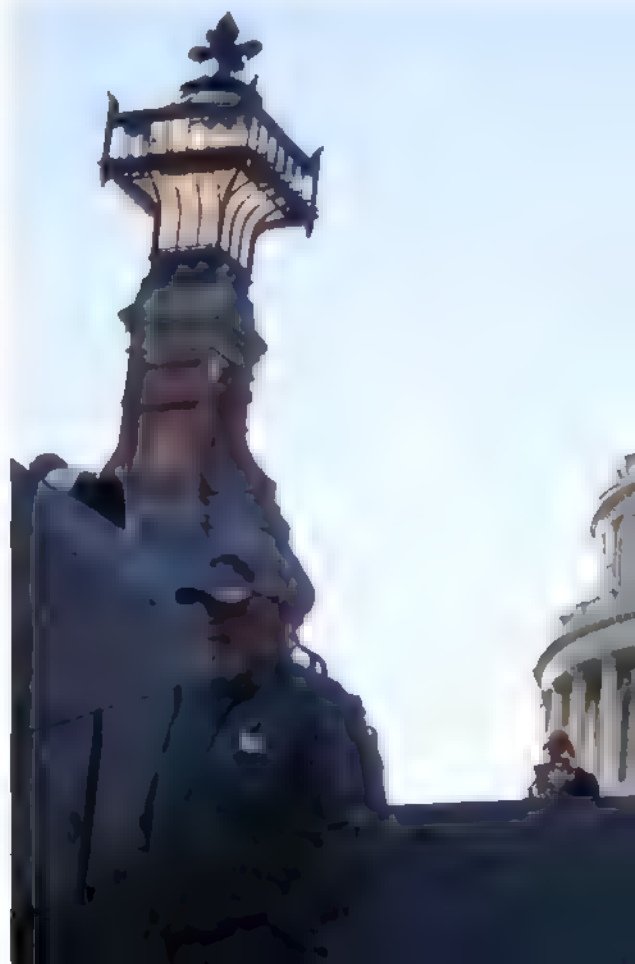
A conservative woman can try to excel within the system, becoming what Dworkin refers to as a "militant conformer" (see: Amy Coney Barrett). But the lurking undertone of fear that motivates conformity still exists as the very foundation upon which she built her life—and the resultant anxiety now requires a "safe" outlet.

This is how today's conservative ideology becomes so enticing to women. Republicans are excellent at providing boogymen for all one's projecting needs. It's not that coal is an unsustainable industry, it's that environmentalism is a scam perpetrated by liberals. It's not that corporations took their business overseas to pay lower wages, but that immigrants stole manufacturing jobs. To conservative women, it's not that they live in a culture that devalues, objectifies and limits them, it's that liberals are trying to erode what would be a utopia if they just let good Americans be.

The conspiracy theories pushed by conservative online communities and Trump himself — Democrats stole the election, a cabal of pedophiles runs the world, the pandemic is a hoax — have the capacity to become the ultimate boogeyman. To be a woman forced to conform to a patriarchal society is to be plagued by a creeping sense of existential unease. Accepting conspiracy as reality provides a balm for that constant tension and anxiety: Yes, you knew it all along, it wasn't just you—something is fundamentally wrong with your world. "Baby-eating Satanists" is as plausible an explanation as any if security within your society depends upon refusal to acknowledge reality—and the person spreading this "truth" now feels like a savior.

This leads us to the central superpower of the conservative white woman, her capacity for paradoxical victimhood. Let's break down one of her most famous iterations, the fearsome "Karen." The Karen can be defined by one core paradox: her ability to believe herself a true victim, while actually victimizing someone else. Karen screams at a delivery person over the restaurant's mistake, Karen calls the cops and falsely claims that a Black man who asked her to leash her dog is assaulting her, so convinced of her victimhood as a woman that she has no qualms about weaponizing her privilege as a white person.

See also Elizabeth from Knoxville, Tennessee, a white woman interviewed during the January 6 insurrection. Footage shows her weeping and indignant about being pepper-sprayed for breaking into a federal building as part of a violent mob. "And why did you want to go in?" asks the interviewer. "We're storming the Capitol! It's a revolution!" cries Elizabeth, sniffing with self-pity. She gasses up the transgressive nature of her "revolutionary" actions and admits to an actual crime, while simultaneously being genuinely upset about reciprocal action being taken against her. We can only guess how she would feel if BLM activists did the same thing. Herein lies the pure essence of Karen: unironically juggling an identity as both oppressor and oppressed, victim and victimizer.



Herein lies the pure essence of Karen: unironically juggling an identity as both oppressor and oppressed, victim and victimizer.

I see this same paradoxical thinking from the white female conservatives I have known. They don't like taxes, so it's fair to do what it takes to vote out liberals. Affirmative action is racist against their white sons. Kids in cages are fine, because immigrant parents should have followed the rules—just as these women have been doing their whole lives, to minimal reward.

This is why conservative white women have been so perfectly primed for Trumpism. The conspiracy theories explain the victimhood they feel but do not dare name. Distrust of all established things—science, medicine, logic—explains their daily unease. Displaced feelings of tension and fear under systemic patriarchy—and the resultant anger—are constantly roiling beneath the surface, awaiting some patriarchally approved expression that will relieve but not endanger her. The conservative white woman suffers from a victimhood that she cannot and will not name, and that those in power in her world—the men who make the rules—are thus free to name for her. When she is selfish and ignorant enough to willingly take up that mantle, a political Karen is born.

Trump may have created bigger and badder boogeyman for Karens to justify increasingly hateful behavior, but endemic patriarchy combined with ignorance, selfishness and white supremacy created them both. Those conditions are still undeniably present in American society. Trump's Karens aren't going anywhere.





A person is lying on a bed covered with a white, textured blanket. They are wearing a black corset and black high-heeled shoes. A red ribbon is draped across the lower part of the image. The person's legs are raised and bent at the knees.

Hayley MORDUE

stagram @_hay

2publin

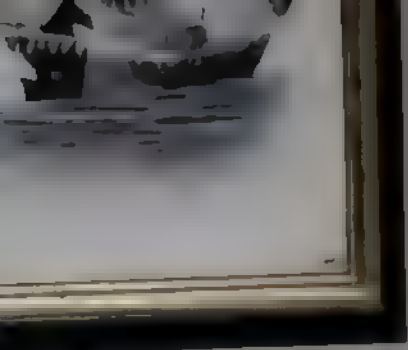


"I'm Hayley Hasselhoff and I am from Newcastle, Australia. I am a qualified dental nurse, but I still love my job. I have a strong passion for modeling and I've been in it since I was 17. I'm from Sydney."











Such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! Talk to us about your career and what made you get into the industry? Thank you for having me be a part of Playboy. I am a qualified dental nurse but apart from my job, I have a strong passion for modeling. As of today's date, I've been in 17 magazines of which are 12 front covers. What made me get into the industry is I grew up as a dancer. I was always in front of the camera from such a young age performing. I loved all the pretty costumes and the makeup. As I got older seeing all the different costumes that would be age appropriate made me want to get into the modeling industry. Now I have been a part of this industry for a couple of years. I love what I'm doing, and it makes me happy.

What is your favorite thing to do? My favorite thing to do is to dance. I've danced forever at my dance school, ever since I was a little girl from 3 years old. I have never stopped over the years and have continued to do it, current to this day.

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? You need to not be afraid to share your ideas and thoughts, regardless of what others think. Speak your heart and mind. Respect yourself enough to stand up for what you believe in, and the welfare of others.

What would you say makes you stand out in the industry? What makes me stand out in the industry would be my appearance. I am covered in a lot of tattoos, which is capturing to the eye whereas other models are clean skin. I am an open-minded model and can easily adapt to new scenarios, try out new looks, not be afraid to push myself, I can get along well with others, and I am easy to work with.

What puts the biggest smile on your face? What puts the biggest smile on my face would have to be my 3 dogs. Seeing how excited and happy they are when I come home from work. Sounds silly but they are definitely, my 3 best friends. They make me so happy.

What are some of your biggest passions? Some of my biggest passions are animals, health and fitness, dancing, and my career growth.

3 ultimate deal breakers when it comes to men? Signs of narcissism, or even abusive behavior. He doesn't prioritize you, and bad hygiene.

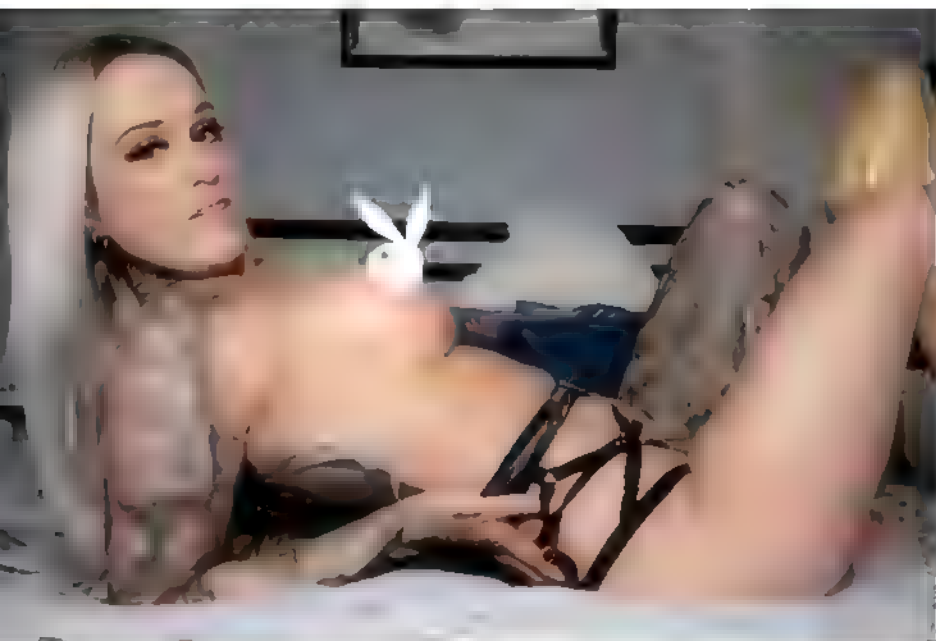
What are some of the things that attract you to a man? I'm really attracted to a guy who smells amazing, takes the time and effort to get to know me and listens to my wants and needs, a good sense of humor, a nice smile, and someone who knows what he wants in life and is going after it. I absolutely adore being around that kind of energy.

What is the most daring thing you have ever done? The most daring thing I have ever done is probably when I was in primary school when my best friend and I had a sleepover. My parents unplugged the internet at night time so we couldn't use the Wi-Fi. My best friend didn't think I could sneak into my parent's room while they were sleeping to plug it back into the wall, but I did it and we got the internet working so we could play games and go on the internet on our iPod.

What is the best way to approach you as an admirer? Unsolicited nudes, strange suggestive remarks and off comments are an unusual way to say hello to someone, I've never really understood why people reach out and start a dialog with you on social media in these ways as you'd never start a conversation with someone like that in real life. Just imagine meeting someone at a Saturday BBQ. Imagine they whip out the overhead projector and start showing their bits at the BBQ. I would run and wouldn't stop, so in essence, a simple hello or hello would do.

Where can our readers catch up with you and stay updated with your work? If you would love to catch up and stay updated with my work, you can find me on my social media accounts which are: Instagram and TikTok. Instagram @haysmor due, TikTok @itsbxbyslays.

We are so happy to have gotten to know you a little bit! Any last words out there for our readers? Thank you for taking the time to get to know me a little better. I'd also like to say a big thank you to Playboy and my photographer Sean Syvester for this amazing dream and opportunity. I am extremely excited and blessed about being a part of the Playboy family.







Jordan Firstman and the Art of the Asshole

WRITTEN BY BEATRICE HAZLEHURST

PHOTOGRAPHED BY NICK RASMUSSEN



He made a name for himself by finding comedy in imperfection and egomania before contending with cancel culture for old missteps. Meet social media's sexy impression chameleon

Nestled into the bed he brands as "sex stained," Jordan Firstman wears his button down wide open, revealing a large-link silver choker as thick as a bike chain. The texture of his green tinged locks coalesces perfectly with the shag of the faux fur-covered wall looming behind him. Though I've never been in it—we're speaking via Zoom. I know his bedroom well. It was featured in Architectural Digest

The bedroom also stars in many of the waggish Insta

gram posts that helped rocket Firstman into wide pop cultural consciousness at the outset of the pandemic. Last year was strange for all of us, but perhaps especially so for Firstman, who claims to be simply a "fat Jewish bitch from Long Island." First he found fame by way of social media comedy. Then he nearly lost it—and some say should have lost it—over three of fensive tweets from 2012, the same year he arrived in Los Angeles with dreams of making it big.

It was early April 2020 when Firstman uploaded his first batch of impressions to Instagram, starting with the timely and spot on "impression of a guy who is addicted to saying that quarantine isn't that different from his normal life." Conceited L.A. denizens, inanimate objects, pet peeves, clichés, "banana bread's publicist" and "the truth trying to catch up with Donald Trump" all come to life in Firstman's episodic impersonations. Usually shot selfie style with a front-facing iPhone camera, the clips showcase his ability to capture the absurdity of the human condition during one of the most unprecedented years on record. They're hilarious, and he knows it.

"There's a possibility I could just keep going up and up, or I could have a catastrophic fall from grace," he tells me on our early December call.



A list celebrities, perhaps at a loss with the overnight erasure of the traditional entertainment industry, flocked to Firstman's content, relating particularly to his takes on the embarrassingly obsequious publicist. Sarah Jessica Parker hit follow; Ariana Grande shared to her story, Katy Perry posted to her feed. "Follow him for whiter teeth, stronger nail beds, good grades and to end Covid."

"Holy shit, Katy Perry just put you on her grid," Firstman's sister, Mandy Talan, remembers telling him.

"Got to go, bye!" he responded.

He wrote, directed and starred as a hideously self-centered, casually cruel man. The same basic summary applies to his next two shorts.

Firstman's five-figure following grew to more than 800,000. Each batch of impressions seemed to outstrip the last. Industry soon came knocking, and the career he'd been pursuing for almost a decade finally found momentum.

"I don't think Jordan is 'Hollywood,'" says Talan, though she readily acknowledges her bias. She's something of a remote assistant for Firstman, helping him with paperwork and other tasks from her home in Minnesota, where she's a social worker. She and her twin, Ali, an HIV researcher, remain protective of their little brother. All three Firstman kids identify as queer, perhaps part of the reason Jordan is so comfortable riffing on themes of identity. They were raised in the sleepy seaside town of Northport, Long Island, the most famous export of which (so far) is Broadway star Patxi Lupone. Their parents were journalists at the local newspaper and, before they split, co-authors of a true-crime book about murder.



Taan is not sure when her brother, once a nice, quiet Jewish boy, she says, shimmied from the wings to take center stage. The family always indulged Firstman's artistic inclinations and was fully supportive when he came out as a pre teen. At the local performing arts high school, his self-described "truth teller" nature was at odds with authority—or at least with authority figures he didn't like. As he recalled on a 2018 episode of the podcast *Seek Treatment With Cat and Pat*, "one teacher in the program was not only particularly nasty, but also made false claims about Broadway credits. Firstman took it upon himself to publicly unmask her fraudulence, causing her to break down in front of the class."

After graduation, Firstman struggled to find his place as a student at the University of Cincinnati's College Conservatory of Music, where he tended to interpret his assignments in an overly provocative manner (A tutor once asked him why he always had to be "so different," he remembers.) Instead of returning for sophomore year at a school that felt like a bad

fit, he headed west to Los Angeles, arriving before his 21st birthday.

It didn't take him long to find his footing in L.A., debuting in 2014 *The Disgustings*, a short and darkly comic film he funded via Kickstarter that skewered the soft, bitchy underbelly of white gay culture. Firstman wrote and directed it, and also starred as a hideously self-centered, casually cruel man. The same basic summary applies to his next two acidly humorous shorts, *Sold* (2014) and *Call Your Father* (2016): writer, director, starring role as self-absorbed jerk. The egomaniac he plays in *Call Your Father* desperately asks his baffled date, a much older man who has spent the evening weighing potential sex against putting up with an unhinged narcissist, "Do you like me?" After a pause, the older man diplomatically ventures, "I'm intrigued by you."

Suffice it to say that Hollywood was slowly becoming intrigued by Firstman. For the next four years, he channeled his creative energy into pitching and developing a TV series based on *Call Your Father* (though nothing ultimately came of it) and notching stints as a writer or story editor for series including *Search Party*, *Big Mouth* and *The Other Two*.

And then came the pandemic, and with it comedians both new and established looking for new ways to make and find funny material. Dave Chappelle in a field, Sarah Cooper with White House voiceovers; Jenny Yang in *Animal Crossing*. And Jordan Firstman on Instagram.

Across his grid, Firstman cavorts gleefully in various states of undress—speedo on the beach, poolside banana hammock, fully nude on the banks of a creek—affectionately referring to himself as "slut."

If it seems as though Firstman has a lot of sex, it's because he does. His oozing sensuality and uninhibited sexuality may well have contributed to his popularity; straight women and gay men alike wax lyrical in his comments. ("Your thighs are masterpieces," Luca Guadagnino, the Italian auteur behind *Call Me By Your Name*, wrote in an email to Firstman upon seeing unpublished photos of the comedian.) Into his inbox and beyond, Firstman foremost welcomes "tatted Latin guys" and "Euro twinks," as well as many different types of men. "I've been getting fucked a lot recently," he says, describing himself as "vers." "I can give you top vibes and then go super sub bottom. I can really say, 'Yes sir,' and believe it." He's manifesting a reality wherein he finds a deep psychosexual connection with a man in every metropolitan center—"I just want to fuck hot boys and feed them natural wine."



As for his female fans, they have good company in his DMs. Chrissy Teigen, Reese Witherspoon and Perry have become blue check friends. Drew Barrymore's account writes "I love you" on his posts. (He also appeared on her talk show.) Mia Khalifa posted a video in which she covered pictures of her lover with photos of Jordan. Firstman is both bemused by and grateful for the onslaught of female attention. He theorizes perhaps he's the toxicity-free macho man women have been swiping for: the type who has deeply emotional epiphanies on ayahuasca but could still choke you with his chest hair.

And he recognizes the power of having women on his side, they are the industry's gatekeepers, or at the very least, its tastemakers, he says. "They're the ones that are going to pay my bills for the rest of my life not those fucking faggots," he jokes. "Those fucking backstabbing faggots."

It's unclear who decided to close out 2020 by sending accountability cum gossip site Diet Prada screenshots of Firstman's 2012 tweets, which made Black women, Indian people and the homeless into the butts of bad jokes. Rumors swirled that it was the miffed ex-boyfriend of one of Firstman's flings who had dug through the comedian's Twitter archive until striking dirt. Regardless, on December 23, wedged between

news of a second stimulus package and Alexander Wang's alleged offenses, the site called out Firstman, asking, "Will the newly minted comedian, who made his way into so many people's hearts, be taken to task?"

Firstman was quick to respond, deleting all tweets (save one Spotify promotion) and sharing a Notes app statement to Instagram in which he apologized for misguidedly testing his comedic voice with offensive material.

"I have grown a million lifetimes since then and I do not stand by [the tweets] in any way," he wrote. "I will continue to work on myself and continue to grow, as I have always sought to do."

Firstman's defense wasn't enough to stave off a barrage of criticism. Playwright Jeremy O. Harris responded in a series of wry subtweets, pointing out Firstman's factual error in his Notes apology he claimed he was 19 when he wrote the tweets, but the last tweet was made just weeks before he turned 21 and mocking his apology Harris's conclusion: "Nobody gets canceled for racism. This is America." Others were quick to mimic Firstman's comedic stylings, using his trademark "impression" gimmick to poke fun at what was perceived as a weak apology.

Before being "#prob.ematic" was something he



had to address, Firstman had told me he was considering taking a break from social media, feeling that a temporary leave of absence from the cultural consciousness might do him some good. Days later, after Diet Prada did its thing, Firstman's social departure felt less than voluntary. He stepped back from Instagram for a spell, emerging in the new year and posting at a slower pace. In a recent post to his Instagram story, Firstman assumed a pensive pose. Over the image he wrote, "I'm back (with boundaries) and feel good...let's make this feel good for both of us."

Initially Firstman didn't want to comment further about his run in with cancel culture, but changed his mind in late February, claiming he's "still processing" everything that happened.

“ I do think I’m a genius. It’s just a fact that I’m doing something that no one else is doing.”

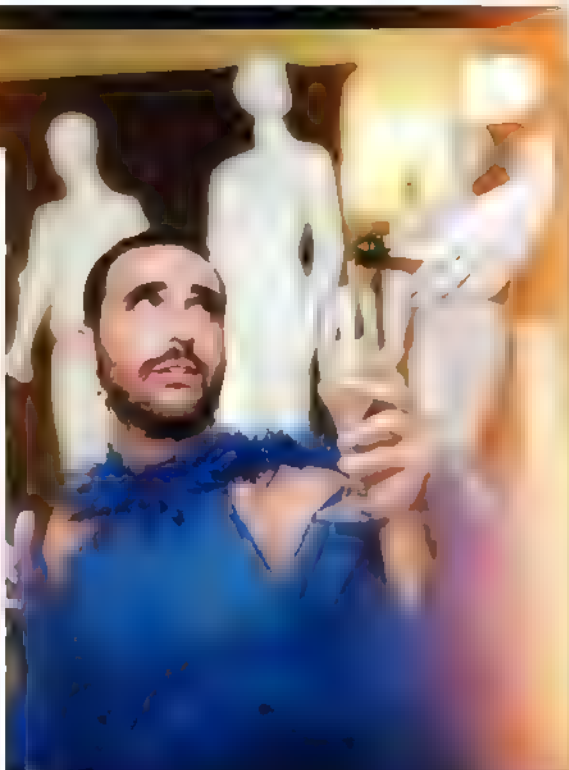
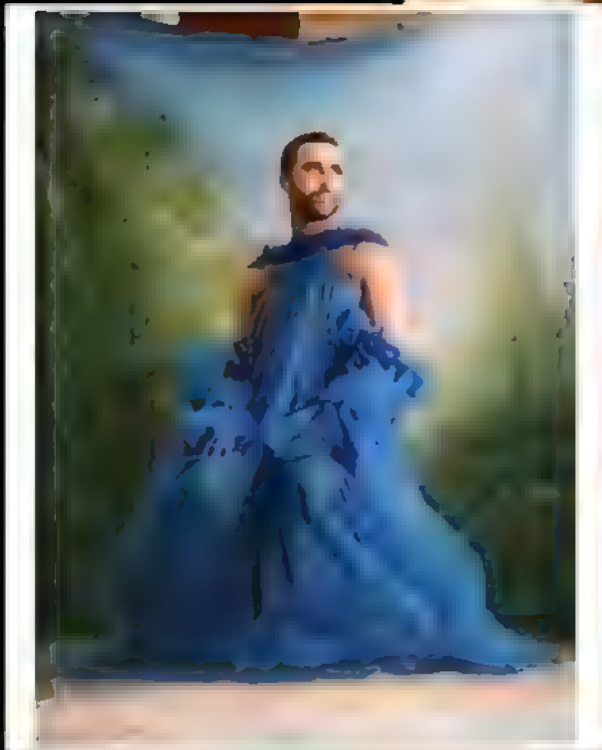
"I am still dealing with it in a major way on an internal level," he says. "It's kind of pushed me into this growth period which was completely vital. It's reminded me of my humanity, of my mistakes. I'm not sure where the growth is leading towards yet, but I take growth very seriously, and I'm taking this experience very seriously."

In early December, when her brother's 2012 tweets were still little time bombs tucked deep in his Twitter feed, Talan had told me, "He doesn't want to offend anybody. He cares what people think."

That last part feels true. In conversation, Jordan is almost alarmingly disarming, and entertainingly open. On our December call, he scrolls through his photos until he finds an old image of himself, taken in the Search Party writers' room. In the photo, he's wide-eyed and wears an even wider smile—but looks can be deceiving.

"He was scared, he's so scared," Firstman says of his pre-fame self. His confidence and self-assurance have grown notably over the past year, as he graduated from being the subject of niche content creator roll calls to digital covers. He acknowledges his strengths and plays to them well.

"I do think I'm a genius," he admits. "It's just a fact that I'm doing something that no one else is doing. In comedy, it's seen as such a faux pas to be positive about yourself at all."



These types of interviews can be a risk, he says. "My arrogance comes off a little more palatable in person. Then when you put it in print, it's not [palatable]."

That's true, too, to some extent. Firstman's self-aggrandizing can come off as funny because it's just so much less socially acceptable than self-deprecation. He tells me he should've been on the Forbes 30 Under 30 list ("Like, bitch, who's doing better?"). He says he serves a purpose in society ("to show people that life is beautiful and fun"). He says he's surprised Hollywood has yet to fall completely at his feet ("I was industry before 'internet'").

"I know that I've had privileges in my life, but I've also had my heart ripped out and my creativity stolen because I am gay, end of story," Firstman says. "It's not this cut and dry, 'You're gay and white, nothing bad has happened to you.'"

Although, plenty of good happened to him in 2020. Partnerships rolled in: Spotify, Target, Signal. Multiple networks wooed him to work on a series, and it became clear everyone wanted a piece. He modeled for Thom Browne and was named a breakout star of 2020 by The Hollywood Reporter. He also wrote, directed and starred in a major fashion campaign. That one was for Versace.

In a world where current events are so effectively caricatured in 15-second clips, it's difficult to extend one's 15 minutes. Yet Firstman has managed it—even

though being his fan won't "end Covid," as Katy Perry joked. As much of his work demonstrates, vanity and self-absorption can make for wildly engrossing comedic characters. Whether that applies to creators as well as their material is irrelevant. One doesn't need to like Firstman to click "like," and follow, and share, as well as be welcomed into his shaggy-walled virtual bedroom. Firstman is undaunted by the attention.

"People have always said I was going to be famous and 'a fucking monster.' But I'm super aware of my self," he says. "And I care about the world. I'm just not a bad guy."





No Filter
With Lola
Kirke

A photograph of a woman's arm and hand holding a tassel, with a large arched window in the background. The window has a grid pattern and is set into a stone wall. The woman's arm is in the foreground, and her hand is holding a dark tassel. The background is a large, arched window with a grid pattern, set into a stone wall. The lighting is soft and natural, coming from the window.

Lola Kirke is trying to
find her voice, but that
doesn't mean she had
nothing to say

AS TOLD TO JESSIE GEOFFRAY

PHOTOGRAPHED BY CHUCK GRANT



"I bring up this idea of branding because if you're in the spotlight as a young person now, you have to figure out your brand. Are you just an actor? Are you an actor and an activist? Are you an actor and an activist and a musician? 'And' ad nauseam. I feel like I'm still finding my voice. I wish I could say, 'This is my cause. This is my purpose on earth,' but at the moment, the world is such a mess, anything can be your cause. I don't feel pressure to present feminism as part of my brand, because it just is. If I say that, though, it sounds like it's part of what I'm selling, and that gets a little complicated. But there is a commercial side to being an artist, and I'm lucky that people are buying it, at least to some degree. Being politically active is fucking cool. There's space to be so many different things. Just give a damn."









Why Hip-Hop's
**Killer Mike is
Making
Confederate-
themed Clothing**



Killer Mike has always used his music to negotiate his views about race and politics. Now, on the heels of the recent violence in Charlottesville, the rapper is expressing them through a new line of anti-Confederate apparel.

BY LIZ SUMAN

IMAGES BY KILLER MIKE

As we continue the nationwide debate over whether marble and stone statues of Confederate fighters should fall under the protections of the First Amendment, hip-hop mogul Killer Mike is creating an opportunity for people to express their anti-racist beliefs on their bodies via his new clothing line, released in the aftermath of Charlottesville.

A longtime advocate of social equality who routinely speaks and writes on systemic racism, the Atlanta-based activist and Grammy-winning rapper regularly uses his music, both as a solo artist and a member of Run the Jewels, to negotiate his political views. Now, he's employing the bodies of his fans.

The visual centerpiece of his new line, *Winners and Losers*, is a graphic of a basketball scoreboard that depicts side-by-side Confederate and American flags with a score of zero-one. The line is a pragmatic, idealistic and unemotional critique of just how subtly racism continues to unapologetically thread itself through American culture. In releasing his t-shirt and tanks, which may be viewed as controversial by some and celebratory by others, Killer Mike is hammering his message that Americans have the right to celebrate their views—as long as they do it peacefully. Playboy talked with Killer Mike to discuss his latest break into fashion, the president and the state of racism in America.

Was the concept for your new line brewing before Charlottesville?

Yeah. I'm a Southerner. The people on both sides are my neighbors. I've grown up with Confederate memorabilia and flags and swag my entire

life. There's a picture of me as a 10-year-old child wearing a Dukes of Hazzard cowboy hat with the Confederate flag, cowboy boots and overalls. As a Southerner, you're accustomed to seeing the flag.

My source of contention has always gone back to when I took Georgia state history from Mr. Flowers in the eighth grade. Mr. Flowers was a white Alabama football coach and a wonderful history teacher; he just retired this year. He helped us understand that the South seceding put it at odds with the United States of America, and it lost. In losing that war, it also lost its right to hang its memorabilia. For most of my life, I understood it as less about 'Hey, it's a hateful game or reinforcing slavery,' and more about, 'Hey, you defied a republic and you lost, so you don't get to hang in the winner's circle with the crew.'

That view gets lost in the debate sometimes. If my neighbor threw up a Confederate flag and invited me to a barbecue, I'd gladly go to his barbecue. He can fly his flag and cook me barbecue. But the minute he tries to put that flag over the tax office where I go to buy my license plate, then, no, you can't do that because you guys tried to defeat your country and you fucking lost.

Is it a symbol that upholds slavery? Yes, because the institution of slavery is what funded the South. It's what made the planter class rich. So, when they say states' rights, what they mean is the rights of states to keep slavery. The bigger issue has always been that you're essentially asking me, with my tax dollars, to honor people who attempted to break the union. That's dishonorable. Should you have Confederate memorials? Absolutely. They should be on private land or in cemeteries or museums.

“Should you have Confederate memorials? Absolutely. They should be on private land.”

With that said, do I want to blow off the face Stone Mountain tomorrow? No, other stuff is higher on my priority list. But I want people to understand in raw terms why I feel that people who follow the Confederate heritage narrative don't get to have their flags and monuments in front of government buildings. And there's no better way to explain stuff to an American than a sports analogy.

Most of your pieces depict a single image or declarative phrase. How do you think the message will translate across demographics?

[*Winners and Losers*] is a clever shirt. I think that smart people will get it and wear it. The kids who are rocking it, get it. Between it and my shirts that reads "kill your masters", they've been two of my most popular. Someone asked about the Kill Your Masters shirt, saying, "Well, what does that mean?" I said, "Well, what other advice would you give someone who was enslaved?" [laughs] I just try to put what people try to present as complex, but to me they are very simple issues.

Why do you say that sports analogies are effective ways of presenting messages about politics?

The Lie Cheat Steal Kill Win shirt is a play on the old Nike shirts from the 1990s that read "Just

do it" and "Winners." But all of the athletes we fucking loved, from Mark McGwire to Lance Armstrong, were doing steroids to win. To me, the truest sports are allowed to be the same as politics. You lie, cheat, steal, kill and win. You do whatever it takes to be in the winners circle. So, the shirts are satirical.

Has this president actively increased the number of racist people in America or instead given existing racists a platform?

I've experienced an environment like the one now all my life. I grew up with black students in a city that was run by the Democratic Party in a state that was Republican and run by whites. So, I've felt this hostility my entire life. If you live in Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, North Florida, either of the Carolinas and even Virginia, you're accustomed to this. Black people certainly know it's here.

If nothing else, Trump's presidency has shown the rest of the country that we still have a long way to go. I don't know why black boys dying at the hands of the police for the last five years doesn't show you that. I don't know why a vigilante killing a black boy on the border doesn't let you know that. For whatever reason, when that young man drove that car through that crowd and killed that young lady, it put the world on notice that this



Editor's Note: Playboy has decided to include this image, which includes a visual representation of a Confederate battle flag, as an opportunity to educate those who may not know what this flag looks like or what its history is. This Confederate battle flag (pictured in the left corner of each article of clothing) has long symbolized many southerners' historical support of slavery and, in recent years, has been associated with white nationalist groups and their ongoing opposition to civil rights.



country has a long way to go in maturing our race relations. We need to get out of these primary, child-like narratives in which we're being picked on and we feel bad because we don't get what we think other people are getting by way of special collective services. We have acknowledged that we have a system in the South and nationwide that's unfair to groups of people. If we don't try to fix it, we keep our country in this weird stagnant place of these never-talked-about racial tensions, until an explosion like Charlottesville happens.

What are the best ways to effect change on what you're talking about? You put out your line of shirts and make music—what about the rest of us?

Act locally. If you're a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant in this country, you already know the rules are skewed in your favor. If you are going to be an ally, be an ally. Stand with them when they're not around. Challenge people who look like you on their bullshit. When you hear subversively racial shit in the classroom or on the job, confront it. If it comes from your family, confront them.

One thing that black people could do is to better practice group organizing and economics. The stronger your communities are by supporting black stores, restaurants and things of that nature, the stronger your community is in terms of self-sufficiency.

Our white allies, our white brothers and sisters, we need you to challenge shit. One of the most beautiful things I saw [last] week were white football players kneeling or putting their hands on the shoulders of black football players who support Colin Kaepernick. It shows that we have allies across the board, and that's what we need from our white Anglo-Saxon Protestant allies.

“

The problem isn't in the president. The problem is in the proletariat.”

Whether you're liberal or conservative, there's this collective sense that something positive may come out of the volatility. Agree?

The atmosphere in this country racially speaking is similar as it was under presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, under Barack Obama and now under Trump. At a certain point, the problem isn't in the president. The problem is in the proletariat. Because we've decided to be comfortable in our anger and guilt, we've gotten a president who, in his audaciousness, reminds us of ourselves. So, the silver lining to me is that Trump shows us undeniably that we have a long way to go.

We need a wake-up call once every two to five years in this country. People in the black community have been waiting for [some] organizations to be called terrorist organizations for more than 100 years. [After] the death of a young white woman who was an ally to my community, finally the news had to call it terrorism.

It wasn't terrorism when Sandra Bland was murdered. It wasn't terrorism when Dylann Roof walked into a church and killed people. So even in the way we report, we have to understand our internal biases and we need to start the change there. I'm not a fan of trying to shut them up. I believe in the First Amendment. They have every right to march. What they don't have the right to do is mow down people or walk into churches and murder people.

What do you have planned next—politically, musically, sartorially?

I'm supporting [Georgia state Senator] Vincent Fort for mayor [of Atlanta]. He stepped away from the Democratic Party to support Bernie Sanders. He was very brave to do that. I'm working hard locally to get him elected.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Better days are right around the corner, if we decide to do the work. If we don't, then we'll spend another 53 years in this perpetual systemic racism hating one another. I'm ready to move past that point.



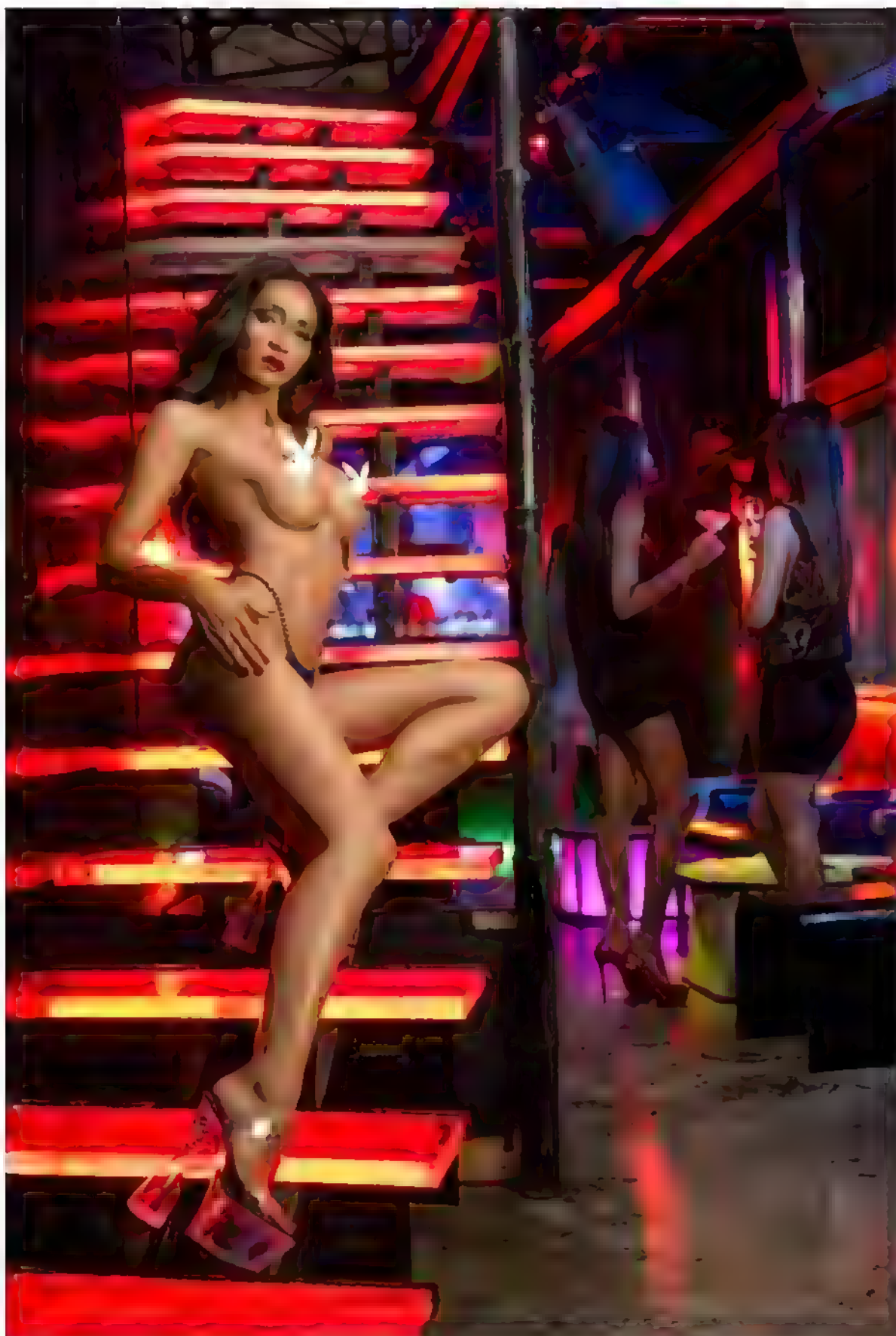
SEDUCTIVE

Bella Smiles

Instagram: @bellasmilesmua

Photography by CJ | @image_factory and Nantapet Yuthleak | @FotoCandley
MUA @smain | @smainmateller
Hairstylist Muu | @tanatmuu
Shooting Venue Black Pagoda: Patpong Museum-Bangkok, Thailand









CJ, a photographer from Hawaii, has been coming to Bangkok for many years. He knows the city as far as one can say that for a metropolis of millions. One district has always fascinated him: Patpong. Bangkok's oldest and most historic red-light district. "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas, but what happens in Patpong can't even be imagined" perhaps best describes this district.

This is where the US intelligence agency, the CIA, had a safehouse in the 1960s. David Bowie shot a music video in a club in the neighborhood. Mohamed Ali, Kendall Jenner, Steven Tyler and Hugh Grant strolled down the storied street of Soi Patpong 2. James Bond chased a car through the district, and in *Hangover* it served as a backdrop just as much for *The Deer Hunter* starring Robert de Niro. Patpong is probably one of the most famous red-light districts in the world. And now in 2022, the countless neon lights of the street Soi Patpong 2 are flickering again. But one club had always caught CJ's eye. He had been there hundreds of times. But only felt. Because the club is a bridge on the third floor, connecting a parking garage to a building. It's all glass and open to the street, so you can see the go-go dancers dancing in the glass and feel the bass of the beats as you walk underneath. And the roof is a black Japanese roof. Hence the name 'Black Pagoda'. CJ thought to himself, I'm sure it's the same for the thousands of others who stroll through this street. Every one of them has been in the Black Pagoda. They all see the club, feel the beats as they walk under it. But where is the entrance? How does one get into this club? CJ began to look into it. He found out that the club served as a backdrop in the international award-winning indie film "Crazy Medicine." That's how he finally got to the operators and after earning their story as well, it was clear to him that he had to do a photoshoot here to tell the club's story in pictures. But from the beginning.

The Black Pagoda has existed since 2008, before which it was a narrow bridge that connected the parking garage on the third floor with the building across the street. The name is inspired by the roof of the club. The entrance via the parking deck was actually just a

stopgap solution but proved to be a catalyst. Can be seen by everyone but entered by some is probably the best summary. Indeed, this club stands out like no other on this street. Everyone sees the club, but very few know how to get in. Those who do know either walk through the graffiti-covered small stairwell at the parking garage, whose entrance has to be climbed over an adventurously high curb or park their car on the third floor in the parking garage. There, a neon sign with the name "Black Pagoda" above a back door points to the entrance to the club. National and international DJs play here. The furnishings are extravagant, opulent sofas and armchairs, go-go dancers' climbing on poles right by the windows facing the street. In the center, a large bar that offers spirits as well as cocktails. The toilets are separated from each other in the washroom by a pane of glass. A brief shock when you expect to see your reflection in the mirror but see a woman in it who was just thinking the same thing. A boutique club, if you will. Publicly visible, yet more intimate than any other club. Something for insiders. There is nothing like it in Bangkok. Maybe nowhere. The club is run by two brothers, Michael and Baruch Messner, the sons of Ernst Fuchs, a well-known Austrian artist. Co-founder of the Vennese School of Fantastic Realism and a friend of Salvador Dalí. The brothers are original residents of Patpong. Already in Thailand for 30 years, they run several clubs in the Patpong district and also in Phuket. They have a special relationship with the Black Pagoda.

Michael, the older of the two, noticed this bridge directly when he came to Patpong some 30 years ago and opened his first bar there. For 10 years, he worked under this bridge every day. And then, in 2005, he worked on the bridge for the first time, looked into the street and saw in his mind's eye big glass walls, a black pagoda roof. A space on the bridge. He decided to make this vision a reality. However, it proved impossible at first. Different owners of parking garage and building, the authorities. No one here was able or willing to support this ambitious plan. There seemed to be no solution. But perseverance is a virtue and with a lot of patience, tact and luck

he managed to acquire the bridge and get a building permit. For this, engineers from the Thai Army's Engineer Staff had calculated the necessary reinforcement of the bridge's steel structure for the pagoda roof covered in shiny black and the support systems for the fully glazed armored glass system. The construction costs tripled. That, too, was mastered. What had appeared in his mind's eye in a brief moment on that bridge in 2005 had become reality in 2007. He had created something impossible.

What was certified as 'impossible' at the beginning by the authorities, the owners, friends and acquaintances whom he confronted with this idea, now towered 3 stories above the street. Nothing is set in stone. Not even the firm conviction of people. And the Black Pagoda is proof that you can create impossible things if you really want to. And this is exactly the feeling you get as a guest of the Black Pagoda. This feeling of space, the angles, the atmosphere. Here on the third floor, directly above the street, the energy vibrates that the young Austrian Michael Messner felt on this bridge in 2005. The energy that allows the impossible to become possible. Perhaps that is what makes the Black Pagoda. Because it is not a club, although DJs play. It's not a go-go bar, even though go-go's dance. It's not a cocktail bar, even though there's a cocktail bar in the middle of the room. What is it then? Even the brothers who run it don't have an answer to that question. The Black Pagoda is a space for people who feel comfortable in this place. Who like to move their bodies rhythmically to crystal clear beats of DJanes and DJs. Who like to drink a cocktail and enjoy the view and those who just linger in one of the opulent seating areas, taking in the energy of the Black Pagoda. Whatever the Black Pagoda is, it is incomparable and something different for every guest.

If you delve into the concept of the Black Pagoda and look around inside, you'll come to the conclusion that the brothers naturally inherited some of their father's artistic streak. They also run a museum. The Patpong Museum, in the neighborhood of the Black Pagoda. The museum tells the story of this neighborhood and enjoys

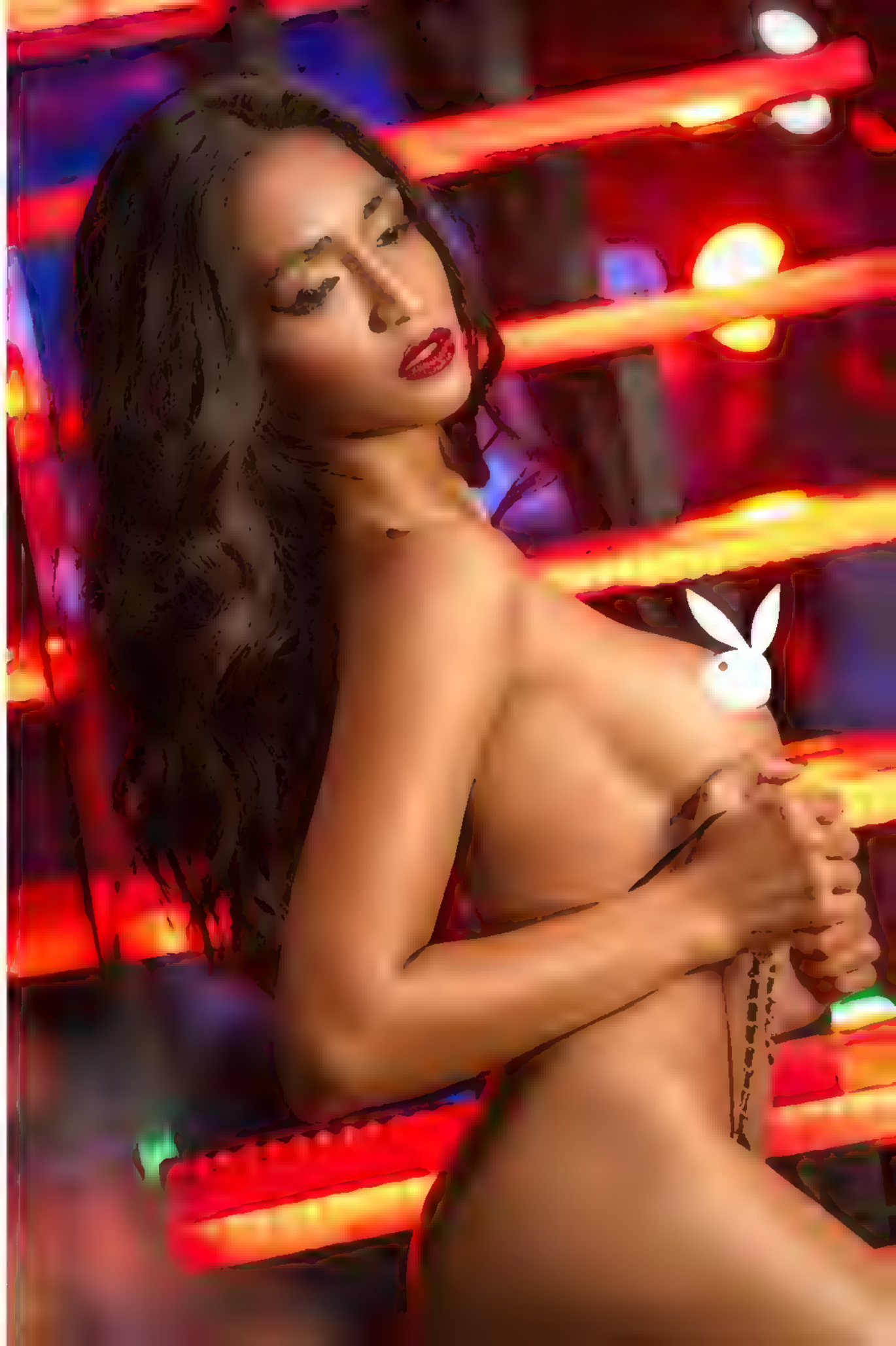




BLACK PAGODA



...the...coverage. The brothers are very...modest. What counts for them is the...and guests. And they are happy...their love of art. Therefore...they immediately agreed to make...Black Pagoda and also the Patpong Museum...available for this photo shoot. CJ hired another...photographer for this big set, Nantpipat Vuthisak...who immediately loved CJ's idea. The two then...immediately came up with an idea for a model...was to be Bella Smiles, a model with Thai roots...She has already been in front of the camera for...FHM, Playboy, Maxim and many other magazines...Most recently, she graced the cover of FHM...Sweden. Now she should be the model that CJ and...Nantpipat use to capture the story of this special...club. After CJ called Bella's agent, it only took a





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A photograph of two hands holding envelopes. The left hand, wearing a dark patterned sleeve, holds a blue envelope. The right hand holds a red envelope. The background is a soft, light-colored gradient.

Letters to Brian

WRITTEN BY BRIAN KAREM PHOTO BY SHUTTERSTOCK

An illustration of two hands, one on the left and one on the right, holding envelopes. The left hand holds a red envelope, and the right hand holds a teal envelope. Both hands are wearing dark, textured sleeves. The envelopes are held up towards the top of the frame, with the red one on the left and the teal one on the right. The background is a light, neutral color.

If there's one thing our White House correspondent has gleaned from years of Trump-era reader responses, it's that some people still have a lot to learn

When I first became a reporter, I enjoyed reading the letters to the editor

I still get a kick out of hearing from readers. My writing often provokes both love and disdain, and I like getting responses from both sides of the political spectrum—especially when those who oppose each other politically find common ground in hating the same articles

Today the feedback from readers often comes via Twitter, though sometimes I get emails and text messages too. I don't always write back, but I like to acknowledge readers when I can, even if we disagree. Recently I heard from a reader about a column I wrote on President Joe Biden's press staff.

The reader called me a libtard follower of the socialist-communist leadership of George Soros (for the record, I've never met the man) and claimed I am destroying our country. I should be muzzled or even jailed for my thoughts, he said. In addition, he declared that I'm behind efforts to remove gun rights and open our borders to immigration

It was a lot to unpack.

**MOST OF THE TERMS
THEY USE, INCLUDING
COMMUNISM
AND SOCIALISM—OR
THE DIFFERENCE BE-
TWEEN REPUBLICAN
AND DEMOCRATIC
PHILOSOPHIES.**

I've exchanged emails and texts with people who made similar accusations hundreds, if not thousands, of times during the past five years. Most of these readers are white men and proudly shout out their love for listening to Rush Limbaugh or watching Sean Hannity on endless loops. They cannot define most of the terms they use, including communism and socialism—or the difference between Republican and Democratic philosophies. These exchanges usually go something like this:

I ask: What is a libtard?

"Democrats and libtards are the same thing. They hate our country and want to overthrow it for socialism."

What is socialism?

"It's the government owning everything and telling us how to think"—something he heard on Rush Limbaugh's show. "God bless him, Rush wouldn't lie. He won a medal of honor. He's the best this country ever produced. If he said it, I believe it."

Trump actually gave Limbaugh the civilian Presidential Medal of Freedom, but we'll let that slide. So should the government pay for hospitals, roads, schools, fire departments or sports stadiums?

"What do you mean? I'm for capitalism."

What if banks fail? Should we spend government money to bail out banks "too big to fail"?

"We can't let the economy collapse. That would kill the little guy."

He sees himself as a strict adherent to the Constitution, unlike me, who he sees as coming for his guns. If I ask what's easier, buying a gun or registering to vote in his state, I'm told guns should be easier because they are protected by the Constitution. That's debatable—also scary if you think it should be easier to shoot someone than to vote—and it begs another question. If you believe in a strict interpretation of the Constitution, why do you want to muzzle me and others who think differently? Isn't that a violation of the First Amendment?

"You can't yell 'fire' in a crowded theater. What about Hillary?"

What? How is speaking your mind the same as yelling "fire" in a crowded theater? (Which, by the way,

that those who govern least govern best. But I still have questions. Is God all powerful? Did he create everything? Does accepting Christ as your savior also mean that Christ was able to forgive Trump Republicans, for they know not what they do?

"God is all of that. But he doesn't forgive anyone unless they're Christian. Otherwise they can go to hell. Trump is his fiery sword. America is a Christian nation. America first. To bell with Muslims and Mexicans and the labs that created the kung flu to kill us off. This is a holy war."

Lastly he'd want to let me know he had bought a lot of merch on Playboy.com, which he'd found by following the stories I wrote "I'm a loyal reader. Though I hate you."

He'd then ask me if it would be possible to get him an invite to the next Playboy party in or around the large Southern city he calls home. "This is Playboy country," he'd assure me.





10 Steps to a Better Border

From improving reporters' access on the ground to raising patrol agents' salaries, these ideas will help the Biden administration improve the southern border situation

BY BRIAN KAREM

PHOTOS BY SHUTTERSTOCK



Few issues facing this country are as divisive as immigration. It is also one of the least understood issues.

Emblazoned on the Statue of Liberty is Emma Lazarus's poem "The New Colossus": "Give me your tired, your poor, / Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, / The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. / Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, / I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

In the past, the United States has unofficially adopted the poem's welcoming sentiment to describe its immigration policy. We are, after all, a nation of immigrants. Some of our ancestors arrived here after being forced into slavery. Some fled political persecution; others fled horrifying economic or religious oppression. Some of us descend from the pilgrims and pioneers who displaced the indigenous people already here. But no matter how a person arrived in America, we were all taught that in this country you could make something of yourself. Here we appreciate hard work and the spirit of individuality. Anyone can achieve "the American Dream."

That dream has always been a tenuous one, and former President Donald Trump, whose thinly veiled racist policies benefited the rich, effectively killed it. He exposed us instead to his dream: Close the doors and limit immigration to the white and the wealthy.

Lost in the passions surrounding the issue of immigration is the history of how we got into this mess. The GOP is having fun bashing President Joe Biden and blaming him for a supposed new "crisis" on the border, while ignoring the facts of the situation and using fear (yet again) to whip up the base. The Democrats offer little pushback as the GOP misleadingly frames the immigration debate. Though the Republicans remain the party of no heart, the Democrats prove they remain the party of no head.

At Monday's daily briefing, Press Secretary Jen Psaki was asked about the treatment of immigrant children at the border. "We have a lot of critics," she responded, "but many of them are not putting forward a lot of solutions."

Psaki wants solutions? I'll take that at face value and propose a few.

The current problems on the southern border are a direct result of Trump's choices.

I have covered border issues since the mid-1980s, when there really was an ongoing immigration crisis. The Mexican oil industry had collapsed and then the economy crashed. Overnight, many Mexicans faced devastating losses and were left with no income and no way to pay for food and shelter. Ultimately that led to shantytowns crowded with hovels built from packing crates, pallets, cardboard and flattened tin cans. I remember visiting one such encampment outside of Monterrey, about 140 miles south of Laredo, Texas. I saw residents brush their teeth using water from a sewage lagoon. The many immigrants I've interviewed are neither lazy nor criminals. I can also tell you that Middle Eastern terrorists don't hike hundreds of miles to get into the U.S., as Republican Representative Kevin McCarthy claimed this week. (They're often well-funded and have easier means to enter the U.S.; sometimes they even fly first class.)

The current problems on the southern border are a direct result of Trump's choices. He defied the actions of previous presidents—including Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush—who dealt with the same problem and encouraged a path to citizenship for immigrants. Today, as result of a combination of Trump's stupid political decisions and the current economic situations in other countries, we have an influx of unaccompanied minors at the U.S.-Mexico border. Some in Central and South America have given up hope for their own futures but still cling to the hope that their children might survive and thrive in the U.S. and therefore send them north. They dream that one day they might reunite with their children somewhere safe, where they can enjoy each other's company without the immediate threat of death, starvation, homelessness and disease.

If you want to understand what's happening at the border with Mexico, make some more phone calls. Talk to mayors and state representatives of border areas. Psaki said Wednesday the president has been briefed on the needs at the border, but he needs to get more personally involved. Make the calls himself. Go to Rio Bravo or El Cenizo in Texas and talk with people whose families fled oppression to become Americans. I have.

Below are 10 more suggestions for how Biden can improve the border situation (he's already embraced some of the ideas).

1. Relieve the pressure of caring for too many unaccompanied children at the border by acquiring abandoned schools, preschools and affordable housing and by hiring more staff to assist in reuniting families. FEMA's plan to use the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center in Dallas to hold up to 3,000 unaccompanied teenage migrant boys is a good first step, as is the construction of additional facilities. But convention centers aren't the best places to harbor large numbers of children—they're just the cheapest.

2. Immediately raise the salaries of the Border Patrol to prevent the best officers from quitting and fleeing to Customs, where they make more money. Do not invest in a senseless, passive wall that does nothing but encourage ladder sales. Invest in people. Hire more

of them and train them for the wide variety of needs the Border Patrol faces every day.

3. To help reconnect families, improve relations between immigrant communities and the government. The U.S. government is seen as the enemy in many immigrant communities. More social outreach could dispel that notion. Also: Stop arresting immigrants when they come to authorities to report crimes or give testimony as witnesses

4. Create a legitimate pathway to citizenship for everyone who wants it.

5. Hold companies accountable for using migrant labor, or simply accept it. The government should also recognize and deal with the differences in the types of migrants, seasonal workers, political refugees and economic refugees often face different problems

6. Carefully select where U.S. money is directed in Central and South America. Crooked governments and drug cartels often work together. Going around these corrupt entities by giving directly to nonprofits and other organizations that provide care in Central and South America—as the Biden administration is already doing—is wise. But each institution that receives this aid must be more thoroughly vetted.

7. Drug cartels thrive south of the border, while many governments are weak and corrupt. Our government directly and indirectly supports both, providing aid to corrupt governments that do our government's bidding. And Americans create markets for drug traffickers. To solve the problem of violence brought about by drug cartels, legalize every drug in the United States. Doing so would lower drug prices and remove violence from the equation. But I've never yet met a politician who would openly embrace and promote that concept. Until our government realistically addresses the domestic demand for drugs, this will continue to be a problem. Face it. If America was waging a war on drugs, the

drugs have won. The Biden administration must find a more effective way to deal with drug addiction and find a way to reduce demand, it cannot invest in violence and narco-terrorism.

8. At the same time, the U.S. should encourage American retail investment in northern and central Mexico via tax breaks, subsidies and other incentives. Nuevo Laredo has been devastated by the cartel wars, as have many other northern Mexican towns that formerly had a higher standard of living. If we're going to invest in our neighbors, American companies are poised to assist and stand to profit.

9. Invest in education in Central and South America. That would guarantee future security. Reinvigorate the Peace Corps and encourage American volunteerism in Central and South America.

10. Make covering the border issue easier for the press. Allow reporters inside the immigration facilities run by the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Health and Human Services. This can only help the press and the public better understand the situation.

This last point is one of the most important. Republicans are notorious for twisting facts and promoting an agenda, which is what they're doing now with immigration (see McCarthy's comments for just one example). As James Carville once told me, he admires their work ethic but not their message. Democrats should take a lesson out of the Carville playbook and refuse to sit down. Promote the facts and empower the press with transparency to do the same.

Without access to the federally run facilities, the press is reduced to reporting on the rising number of juvenile immigrants without being able to fully understand the situation. Lack of press access allows the GOP freedom to scream about a "crisis" at the border. It doesn't help put the numbers in context. It doesn't help anyone understand the complexity of the problem.

The immigration issue won't go away until we face facts. The United States helped create it and current policies help sustain it. Most of my sources on the border say they are happy with some of the actions Biden has taken so far, but they also believe the administration can and will do better.

The real question is how effective the government can be when it merely deals with the symptom (illegal immigration) without dealing with the causes (corrupt governments and narco-terrorism). There are no quick fixes to a problem that has been ongoing for more than 40 years and bungled by every administration.

Biden and his administration must reassess U.S. foreign policy, come to terms with this nation's drug problems in a realistic way and accept that those who flee their homes are human beings who merely want the opportunity at the life most of us already have, along with the privileges we take for granted.

To solve the problem of violence brought about by drug cartels, legalize every drug in the United States.



The Biden Dog and Pony Show (Minus the Pony)



On Tuesday afternoon D.C. went crazy after a White House reporter asked Press Secretary Jen Psaki if the Bidens planned to euthanize their dog Major, a three year old German shepherd rescue, after it barked at, bit, nipped and/or growled at a Secret Service agent

Psaki said there was no serious injury, so I guess there were no puddles of blood in the Oval Office. But some in the press and on social media reacted with more vehemence than if the dog were a president who called the pandemic a hoax. It was almost as if Major were a member of the British royal family accusing someone of racism.

Meanwhile, in actual news, the rats are bailing the GOP's sinking and rotting ship faster than you can say "stimulus check."

Senator Roy Blunt of Missouri is the latest to let the world know he can't stand what the GOP is doing and won't have any more of it, declaring he won't run for 2022 reelection. Yet Blunt remains too scared to call out his party for its nonsense—after all, he went along with it for the past four years. Donald Trump sent out a statement, since he can't tweet anymore, praising Blunt for his service.

With its ongoing defections, the GOP is quickly becoming the party of whacked out QAnon supporters who have more in common with conspiracy theorists on hallucinogens than anyone else in America. They attack President Joe Biden, his stimulus plan and the First Family's dogs as if

Biden were President Obama wearing a tan suit.

A recent Pew Research Center poll found that 70 percent of respondents support Biden's latest stimulus package. GOP politicians including Marjorie Taylor Greene, Lauren Boebert, Matt Gaetz, Lindsey Graham, Rand Paul, Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley do not. Had the GOP maintained its dominance in the Senate, there is little doubt the stimulus bill never would've passed. Anyone who gets a stimulus check this spring should write a personal thank-you note to the voters in Georgia who elected not one but two Democrats, thus flipping the Senate and giving Democrats a working majority.

Black voters from Georgia came out in record numbers, saving the economy and possibly the Republic. As Winston Churchill said, "Never was so much owed by so many to so few."

Some may consider it hyperbole to compare those who voted blue in Georgia to Spitfire pilots in the World War II Battle of Britain, but I think it may yet prove to be an understatement.

President Biden, as it turns out, reads the tea leaves of U.S. sentiment better than the GOP, and better than most in the media. Too bad Biden's communications team isn't as good as he is; that department in particular continues to suffer self-inflicted wounds.

As alluded to above, there was some criticism Tuesday aimed at the press for asking a question about Biden's dogs during the press secretary's daily briefing. Some of that blame lands on the White House itself; it continues to limit the access of the press to pool reporters, many of whom are the youngest and least experienced of the journalists who cover the White House.

But the White House has more serious press problems. Tuesday, in a prime example of opaque transparency, Psaki refused to confirm specifics about the surging number of unaccompanied minors illegally crossing the southern U.S. border. The media have confirmed that in February alone more than 7,000 children crossed, yet Psaki wouldn't put numbers to it, instead passing the buck to the Department of Homeland Security, which also won't confirm numbers. Psaki is there to give the press answers, not to play hot potato with tough questions. Part of the reason she loathes putting statistics on the record is the

TOO BAD BIDEN'S COMMUNICATIONS TEAM ISN'T AS GOOD AS HE IS; THAT DEPARTMENT IN PARTICULAR CONTINUES TO SUFFER SELF-INFLECTED WOUNDS.

fear it might make Biden look bad. She declined to call the border situation a crisis—a word the Biden White House has refrained from using but the Trump administration used almost as often as “fake news.”

The fact is, there is no current crisis on the border with Mexico. An actual crisis on the southern border did happen—in the late 1970s, after the collapse of Mexico’s oil economy and subsequent heavily devalued peso sent record numbers of undocumented workers across the border. That was a crisis. But the Biden White House is so fearful of the anti-immigrant Trump mob that it hides from actual facts. Trump created the crisis. Biden has defused it.

On Saturday, March 6, the White House sent a delegation to the southwestern border. A White House news release documented who went, when they went, why they went—but we weren’t told where they went. Since the United States shares a nearly 2,000-mile-long border with Mexico, it might be nice if we had more details about where the delegation went, beyond to the “southwest.”

Because the White House wouldn’t supply a location, some in the media began wondering, reasonably, what the president had to hide. What was really going on? Why would you send a team to the border and not elaborate? I was told that out of concern for the safety of a DHS facility the White House wouldn’t release the location its team visited. That sounds sketchy to a veteran border reporter, and sure enough by Monday, Psaki announced the location was in Carrizo Springs, Texas. I’ve been there many times. It’s got a Walmart. I wonder if Garzita’s is still open. Good restaurant.

Psaki conducts plenty of press briefings, but the White House has not yet held a presidential news conference with Biden himself, for which it has also received some grief. A question about that on Monday was met with Psaki snark. After confirming that Biden, who she said has done “about 40 Q&A’s since he took office,” was planning to hold a formal press briefing by the end of the month, she seemed to take offense when asked if that meant the briefing room would see more of Biden in general. “I don’t know that you’ll see him more than 40 times a month, but...I’m happy to ask him that question.”

As Psaki noted, Biden has made himself available for very short, easily controlled sessions with a small number of reporters on the South Lawn, copying Trump’s approach to “chopper talk.” He has also taken questions in the Oval Office, in the Diplomatic Room and in other places the press pool gathers. Psaki’s reasoning seems to be that these highly regulated, one- or two-question interactions between the president (who can step away if questions get tough) and some members of the press (who are shooed away when things get difficult) are a substitute for a full blown news conference.

They are not. The heat the administration is getting for keeping Biden away from a press conference will disappear if he stands up, as promised, by the end of the month to take questions and supply real answers on a variety of subjects with more than just a handful of reporters in attendance.

Biden’s administration is doing itself a disservice. The president, as most Americans agree, is handling the pandemic well, and his stimulus package has been well received. So why does his communications team try to hide him?

Biden and his team do not wear halos. We should not bow and be lovingly thankful that they are better than the Trump team. Reporters from media outlets that are already in a mood for blood are going to act like sharks chasing chum in the water, especially when Biden’s team acts as if it doesn’t need to answer legitimate questions.

Should the presidential press be asking questions about euthanizing dogs? I firmly believe there is no such thing as a bad question. I remember reading about the time a reporter asked Betty Ford if her kids smoked weed. Everyone thought it was a bad question, until she said, “Yes.” So any question is fair game, and many Americans are interested in the president’s dogs, Major and Champ. (I still bring dog treats to the White House.) So let the dog questions continue. But there are more important questions to ask and more challenging issues

**PSAKI IS THERE TO GIVE
THE PRESS ANSWERS, NOT
TO PLAY HOT POTATO WITH
TOUGH QUESTIONS.**



mean that won't happen to the fullest extent possible. And Psaki, who isn't part of Biden's inner circle, is showing she really doesn't want to (or cannot) handle the more difficult topics, let alone the larger number of reporters that should be in the room under normal circumstances.

The American public and the world at large deserve to know what the president is thinking, and not through the filter of a press secretary. Democratic strategist James Carville once told me that presidential spokespeople are there to "put the most faithful light" possible on the president. Press secretaries are not objective. "I represent the interests of those I work for," Carville said. "People understand that. I don't pretend to be an impartial observer. I'm not."

The escapades of Donald Trump's many White House press secretaries gave us all a wake-up call as to just how low one can go when defending a president. We expected more out of Psaki. We got your typical smiling bureaucrat who's there to defend the president. Yes, that is a big step up from the propaganda swill spewed by the previous occupants of the White House.

But it isn't good enough. Biden's team is already taking hits from his own party. You can only hope the Democrats wake up before they implode like their GOP counterparts.

Or, you know, before the country goes to...the dogs. (I'm used to biting the hand that feeds me.)





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MUA Demie Louise | @demielouisemakeupandbeauty_
Production by @socialikon
PR by LA Media Group | la.mediagroup













Such an absolute honor to have you on Playboy! What are your plans for the rest of the year? This year's all about personal growth and traveling. Becoming the best version of myself. Growing my bank account and my gatus.

What is at the top of your list to achieve the most this year? Featuring in Playboy is hard to top but I can't wait to keep progressing in my career. Have a few trips lined up so that's exciting.

How did you come to shoot with the new platform Social Ikon? I had seen the launch of their new platform and I put my name forward and won their prize giveaway which was a once in a lifetime experience.

What does it mean for you to be seen as a strong, intelligent, ambitious woman? It means everything. I speak my heart and express my mind. I have a strong sense of identity. Being a woman in today's world allows me to be confident and empower other women to achieve their goals no matter how big.

What would you say makes you stand out in the industry? I've been in the industry for over a year and achieved so much already. I graduated in photography so when it comes to being creative, I'm never short on ideas. My body of work is magazine, and I use my background in photography to my advantage when it comes to my content.

Where are we most likely to find you if not in front of the camera being glamorous? When I'm not in front of the camera I'm either in the gym or cooking. I'm fortunate to have a personal trainer as a boyfriend (@fitbymando) therefore food and exercising are a daily routine for me. It's important to look after your body on the inside as well as out.

What are some of your biggest passions? Some of my biggest passions are astrology as I am a very spiritual person. Exercising. It's important not only for my physical appearance but for my mental

Cooking - I love experimenting with food. And photography. I love taking photos, whether it be of myself or helping my friends with their photos.

3 ultimate deal breakers when it comes to men? 3 ultimate deal breakers when it comes to men are 1. If he doesn't believe in astrology (isn't open to it) 2. Doesn't get along with my family and friends 3. Doesn't like horror films.

What are some of your best career highlights so far? One of the biggest highlights in my career so far is winning the Social Ikon shoot. I met some wonderful people, gained an experience of a lifetime, and gained some amazing content for the platform.

Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years? It's hard to predict where I'll be in the next five years. All I know is I'm evolving up and my goals are only getting higher and so is my success.

What is the wrong way to approach you as an admirer? The wrong way to approach me as an admirer is approaching me with an empty wallet. Only respond to my admirers on Social Ikon where we have a more one-to-one exclusive experience.

What can our readers expect from your Social Ikon profile, and can they catch up with you on them? Expect nothing but the best from my social ikon page. I'm active 24/7, I'm always available to talk. If you want to interact one-on-one, you'll find me on Social Ikon.

We are so happy to have gotten to know you a little bit! Any last words out there for our readers? My advice to the readers would be everything happens for a reason. And if you believe it, you're already halfway there. Trust the process and express gratitude daily.



Jerry Seinfeld's Bland Ambition



Will America's
slowest fast-rising
comedian finally
hit it big?

BY STEPHEN RANDALL

ILLUSTRATION BY ALAN REINGOLD

Jerry Seinfeld is one happy stand up comic. In front of him, filling the cavernous Bren Events Center at the University of California at Irvine, are 1,746 people who have paid to see Seinfeld and only Seinfeld. That's a lot of people for a stand-up comic—more, for instance, than Bob Hope drew when he played Irvine—and it's doubly impressive when you consider that this is a Sunday in the middle of a three day holiday weekend when most sensible students are off skiing or getting their laundry done at Mom's.

"Here we are in the gym," jokes Seinfeld. "We're in the gym and we're going to pretend it's a night club. We won't notice the scoreboard, we'll just pretend it's a little intimate cabaret somewhere on campus."

This isn't Seinfeld's first trip to Irvine, a conservative Orange County community about an hour south of Los Angeles. But last time—a mere 10 months ago—he wasn't headlining at the gigantic school gym, he was doing what he had always done, playing a small comedy club just off campus. For 14 years, the 36-year old comic has appeared at clubs, opened for big name acts and done frequent guest shots on Carson and Letterman, but during the past year, there has been a measurable spurt in his career. He sold out New York's Town Hall, which seats 1,500, found himself courted by NBC for a sitcom and was booked by Letterman as the only legit guest for his seventh anniversary show. Suddenly, there is a buzz around him, a certain understanding that after 14 long years of paying dues, Jerry Seinfeld is on the cusp of being the Next Big Deal in comedy.

If one can judge by crowd reaction here in Irvine, Seinfeld is already a big deal. His casual observational humor—he's sort of a white Bill Cosby but with more punch lines—causes rollicking waves of laughter. It's middle-of-the-road stuff—about his neighbors with the pet monkey ("If you need a pet that roller skates and smokes cigars, it's time to think about a family. You're so close"), about commercials ("They say Tide cleans bloodstains. I say if you've got a T shirt with bloodstains, then maybe laundry isn't your biggest problem"), about the post office ("Watching postal employees is like watching a lava lamp")—but the delivery and the timing are honed by constant practice, taking the material up several notches. There's nothing shocking here—not even a stray four letter word—nor anything that could conceivably go over the head of anyone with even a moderate television education. That's one of the reasons the turnout is so large—Seinfeld has an appeal that crosses generational boundaries. It's the type of crowd you'd expect to see at a baseball game or a family reunion, not at a college comedy concert. Students, with arms around their dates, sitting next to senior citizens, and lots of couples in between, some who simply live nearby and others who work or teach at the university.

But no one—not even one elderly woman who has dressed for the Cocoanut Grove, with big chandelier earrings and glitter in her hair—is more out of place at a college concert than an adult man sitting all alone, taking notes. I know. That's what I'm doing. And there's another one next to me. He's alone, he's taking notes. Balding and athletic, he's too old to be a fledgling comic stealing jokes and too intense to be a hobbyist. Since Seinfeld's publicist has assured me I'm the only one currently working on a Seinfeld story, I figure this guy is a critic. In fact, it occurs to me that he may even be the legendary Lawrence Christon, the country's first full time comedy critic for a major newspaper. Christon has been on the comedy beat for the Los Angeles Times for more than 10 years, and during that time, he has brought a rather rigorous set of standards to an art form populated by rule-breaking renegades. Certainly, no one else who writes about humor in L.A.—arguably the comedy capital of the country—is read by more people, in and out of the industry. We nod politely to each other, and I even watch his belongings at his request when he heads for the men's room, but neither one of us makes a stab at conversation. We're just a couple of guys who attend comedy concerts by ourselves and take lots of notes.

On stage, dressed like a creative type from the

Seinfeld jokingly refers to his climb as "seepage, kind of slow seepage."

ad agency on thirtysomething—your basic sneakers and Armani look—Seinfeld weaves his way through his set. He exits to thunderous applause—so much, in fact, that he comes back for that oddity, the stand-up encore. Comedians don't get to do them much in clubs, where the bottom line rises or falls on the ability to clear out the club after one show and get those heavy drinkers seated for the next.

A Seinfeld encore consists of taking questions from the audience, a practice he introduces with a wry "Let's see how much material he really has...." There are some questions—"Did you go to Catholic school?" ("Guess again," suggests Seinfeld)—but mostly, the audience, like music fans shouting out titles, wants to hear routines it already knows. "Socks," one guy yells. "Dogs," says another. And Seinfeld obliges. When one fan requests the "black box on airplanes" routine, he shakes his head. "I think Jimmy Aleck is the comedian you're looking for on that."

Backstage, which is really the girls' locker room, Seinfeld is tired but genial, signing autographs, enduring interviews by pesky, would-be comics from the campus radio and TV stations, answering more questions. Later, he'll walk to his car for the drive home, past hundreds of fliers posted to the walls and pillars on campus announcing: A.S.U.C.I. Presents America's Most Imitated Comedian, Jerry Seinfeld, the Keenly Perceptive King of Observational Humor.

...

Jerry Seinfeld is one unhappy stand-up comic. It's two nights after his triumphant Irvine show, and he's at the Improv, a landmark L.A. comedy emporium, idly pushing his pasta salad around his plate. That morning's Times contained a review by the ferocious Christon of Seinfeld's performance. If that had been, indeed, Christon next to me, we saw very different shows. "Laughing on Empty," read the headline, and that was the kind part.

"Jerry Seinfeld...bills himself with all due modesty as 'America's most imitated comedian' as well as 'the king of observational comedy'—news to us. Seinfeld is a pleasant, effortless performer who works clean (no small feat in this time of the howling, offal heaving monkey)... He doesn't traffic in the mindless hate—or self hate—that characterizes so many other stand-ups.... He's expressive. He's clear. And he's completely empty... There isn't a single portion of his act that isn't fun—amazing might be a better word—but 10 minutes or so into it, you begin wondering what this is all about, when is he going to say something or at least come up with something piquant... Seinfeld has no attention span... He has no frame of reference. Yeats had a line about 'paying homage to uneven,' Seinfeld pays homage to insignificance, and he does it impeccably."

The Improv is the hangout for comics in L.A., so you can be sure that everyone in the club has read the review. Off to one side, Seinfeld's publicist is busy wringing his hands and looking pale. Seinfeld's manager spent the day in a state of red alert. He was at a crucial point in the negotiations with NBC, so he promptly photocopied 10 or so good reviews Seinfeld had gotten from other newspapers and had them sent by messenger to the NBC brass, in the hope of offsetting whatever unpleasant effects the Times review might have had.

Seinfeld takes a drink of his Perrier and says what all performers say after a bad review, "It's one guy, and that's what he thought. There were 1,800 people there—what did they think? The audience makes the judgment and you can go right to them."

He does confess, however, that the beginning of the review—the part about the billing—really got to him. Neither he nor his manager had anything to do with it, he protests. It was all the school's fault. "Most imitated," he sputters. "The king...it made me sound like Siegfried and Roy. It's like a side show byline. I should have said something in the show, when I came back for the encore. I should have never let it go." He even called Christon's office at the Times and left a message explaining the mix-up.

But there's more to Seinfeld's angst than the billing mistake. Whether he acknowledges it or not, the review hits on the problem that has plagued his career: He's a consummate comedian. He writes very funny material and delivers it in a polished manner that many other comics envy. But being funny hasn't always been enough. Seinfeld first appeared on The Tonight Show in May 1981, shortly after Garry Shandling made his debut. Shandling's career took off quickly—he even ended up guest hosting for Carson—while Seinfeld kept on touring clubs. Steven Wright became a star after one appearance on The Tonight Show, Seinfeld has had more than 20.

Part of the problem, to be sure, is that Seinfeld is a bookless comedian. He has no gimmick. Unlike Shandling's single guy lament or Richard Lewis's autoneuroticism, there's nothing unique about Seinfeld's material. He doesn't make Sam Kinison sized waves or stand out physically like Louie Anderson or Gallagher. He's as well suited for the hip and cynical Late Night with David Letterman as he was in 18 appearances on the cornball Merv Griffin show. He's Mr. Generic.

Talk with Seinfeld's friends and colleagues and they'll point out the up side to his generic comedy. He wears well. There's no gimmick to get tired of. He's as funny the 10th time you see him as he was the first.

Jay Leno, who is a kindred spirit comedically as well as one of Seinfeld's closest friends, sympathizes. "By being a normal person who is a funny guy, Jerry has to do 20 appearances to only one the guy

who is outrageous and strange has to do. With Jerry, you say, 'Oh, I saw a guy last night. He was very funny, but I can't remember who he was.' After a while, you get a reputation for being reasonably consistent and reasonably funny. That's how my career worked, and I think our careers have paralleled almost exactly, even though I am five or six years older. He is at the same point I was five or six years ago. He's getting some heat and people know who he is."

Seinfeld jokingly refers to his climb as "seepage, kind of slow seepage" and says he understands the problem "I don't have big openings, you know. Everything in my act is of a similar quality. I don't have really big finishes. It's just kind of like me, I guess. My life didn't have a big opening and I doubt I'll have a big finish. I'll probably die very calmly, look at my watch, look at the doctor and say, 'I think that will about do it.'"

Seinfeld, like Leno, has come of age during a time when life is tough for traditional observational comics. Fads change, and today the important thing for young comedians is to do something new (like Wright) or outrageous (like Andrew Dice Clay). Doing what comics have always done—taking the day-to-day life most of us lead, trying to chase a hair off the shower wall—and reinterpreting it as humor, well, that's no way for a stand-up to stand out. Leno is one of the few to make the leap from hokum to hip.

Even Seinfeld sees a connection between his recent career surge and Leno's success. "Jay has established himself now, so people started looking around again."

"You mean there was a vacancy in the observational comic slot?" I ask.

"Yeah, in the level that Jay just vacated. So people started noticing me. But I had been there all along."

He eats a little of his pasta salad and heads for the Improv stage, where he'll do a 15-minute set. His good friend comedian Jimmy Brogan stands by with a watch to time the first several jokes. They're the new material he'll use the following night, when he makes his 23rd appearance on *The Tonight Show*.

...

Fresh out of the shower, dressed only in his suit pants and socks, Seinfeld is padding about his West Hollywood condo, getting ready for *The Tonight Show*. It's a sparsely furnished, ultramodern look: what little furniture he owns is either black or gray—and everything is impeccably neat. Of course, when you travel 300 days a year, you don't need too many chairs, but the neatness is almost off-putting. Seinfeld drives his girlfriend crazy by refolding her towel the right way after she takes a shower. "If someone walks into my house, even if she's very smart and very aware, there's nothing she can move—even if she moves it back to where she thought it was—that

I won't notice." Leno describes his home as a "hospital room for stereos," and another friend, comic Jeff Cesario, warned Seinfeld, "One of these days, you're going to be living with a woman, things will be going great, you'll be getting ready to get married and then, boom, she'll bring home a throw pillow and it will be over."

"I like that kind of Zen Buddhist atmosphere, very physically clean, mentally clean," says Seinfeld. "I'm very organized." Despite his travel schedule—three or four cities a week—he's careful about discipline. He writes daily (always with a Bic pen and a legal-sized pad), practices yoga, has meditated for 18 years and eats a rigorous diet of healthful food—an amazing achievement, given the fact that comedy-club cuisine generally runs the gamut from hamburgers all the way to cheeseburgers. He spends half of his life sitting at bars, drinking mineral water. "Comedians either abstain from drugs and alcohol or are the worst substance abusers of all time," explains Leno. "There's no in-between."

Seinfeld pulls something light but high-protein out of his refrigerator, eats while standing up, then finishes dressing. He drives a few blocks to pick up Brogan, who provides emotional support for his *Tonight Show* appearances. (Seinfeld does the same for Brogan, in fact, a few years back, he was on the road when Brogan was booked on short notice for his first appearance on the show. Seinfeld heard about it from a friend and flew in for the one night.)

Brogan isn't the only one trying to shore up Seinfeld. On the surface, he seems hardly nervous at all, but around him, his publicist, his manager and the *Tonight Show* staff are tense. Everyone is worried about the review and feels the necessity to say something about it. Peter Lasaly, the show's producer, goes out of his way to reassure him. George Shapiro, Seinfeld's manager, tells him how upset Carl Reiner, another client, was about the review. Leno calls to wish him well, just in case. Lawrence Christon may be miles away physically, but he's a powerful presence backstage in beautiful downtown Burbank.

Preoccupied by the talk about the review, Seinfeld gets off to a slow start, and he knows it. "You're like a fighter pilot out there," he says. "You're checking the dials and seeing if you can find the mistake." He makes a midflight correction, ends up with a



killer routine, including one joke that *The Tonight Show* uses in its promos: "Nothing in life is fun for the whole family. There are no massage parlors with ice cream and free jewelry."

That night, after dinner with his manager, he returns home and finds a message from Christon on his machine. "He was as gracious and charming a guy as you could find," says Seinfeld. "He was sorry she'd gotten the wrong impression about the billing and said he was going to print a retraction."

No retraction ever appears. Ten days later, the *Times* publishes a letter from the man in charge of the show at Irvine, who takes the blame for the cheesy advertisement, but it also runs a letter praising Christon for exposing "the most overrated comedian in America."

Seinfeld assures me he doesn't care. Later, his publicist tells me that Seinfeld has fired him. "He was unhappy about the Christon deal," said the flack. "He felt I should have been more involved."

...

"There was a lot of copy coming through that week and I think the editor had a cold and they just didn't deal with it," explains Christon, who was, indeed, my fellow lonely comrade at the Irvine concert. "It wouldn't have been a retraction of the review, of course, just a retraction of the error. I had seen Seinfeld a number of times, so I don't think my knowing about the billing would have changed the text much, but it did give me a sharper angle of attack."

In the comedy business, everyone takes getting laughs seriously, but none is more earnest than Christon. He's 50 years old and spent years as a theater critic before he turned his attention to comedy. Unlike many people who write about humor, he never tries to compete by getting laughs, and while the *Times* occasionally runs letters from readers who complain that they need a thesaurus to understand him, Christon, by virtue of his tenure, the power of his paper and his intelligence, has clout.

"You always criticize in the name of something," he says. "You're not just saying you like it or dislike it. That's not criticism. That's opinion. To me, the great comedian gets the joke and the joke leads to something deeper." He likes Richard Pryor, Robin Williams and Lily Tomlin. He loves Jay Leno because Leno exposes the hypocrisy in the culture around us. Christon doesn't dislike Seinfeld. "He's a very likable fellow," he says. "He's clear, he has great imagery, he is funny, but after a few minutes, you want more. It's like eating cotton candy. There's nothing very nutritious."

As the days drift by, the review fades into memory. The NBC negotiations were unharmed, and Seinfeld now has a shot at doing a show for the network. He'll create it, he'll write it and he'll star in it, playing the

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I enjoy all these trappings—the airports, the smoke in my face, the humiliating dressing rooms. I like it.”

one character he knows he can play—himself. "I'm no big deal actor," he admits. And the subject, of course, couldn't be nearer nor dearer to his heart. "Hopefully, it's not a typical sitcom," he says of *The Seinfeld Chronicles*. "It's kind of a look into the day-to-day life of a comedian and how he translates life into comedy." The show features Seinfeld being a civilian, with wacky neighbors and weird encounters, then cuts to him as a comic, turning what we've all seen into a stand-up routine in front of a live audience. "The only reason I would consider committing to it is that I'd be doing stand-up on the show."

For reasons that not even Seinfeld fully understands, he's wedded to the idea of doing live, stand-up comedy. "It's a life mission for me," he says. "I don't know what the hell I'm trying to accomplish, but I can't stop." There are a few logical reasons, of course. Money is one. Control is another. Most of show business is a collaborative art. Only the stand-up gets to be his own writer, producer, director and star. And Seinfeld loves being in control. That's why he refolds towels. That's why he leaves his R993,100.00 Porsche Carrera at the airport when he travels rather than take a cab or ask a friend for a ride. "I hate depending on anyone," he says. He lives what for the average person would be a grueling existence. He logs nearly 300,000 frequent flier miles in an average year of travel (his mom cashed in some of those miles recently and took a free trip to Europe). He spends 300 nights a year in hotel rooms, by himself, away from his friends, away from his girlfriends, away from any of the normal structure that makes up a life.

Shapiro, his manager, keeps telling him he can stay home for a while. "I said, 'If your suitcases get too heavy, just let me know.' So far, they've never gotten heavy for him."

"Well, let's envision the situation," says Seinfeld. "I'm sitting in my apartment. My agent calls. He says

there's someone who would like to pay me a tremendous amount of money to come and talk to these people. Can I do it? I can't imagine myself saying, 'No, there's no possible way I can go and talk to these people.'"

"But what about less hardy souls, people who might say, 'Listen, I've already taken three planes this week, I need a break'?" I ask.

"What am I doing on these flights? I'm reading a magazine. I'm saying, 'Yes, I think I will have lemon with that club soda.' Does this really wear people down? You refuse to accept the fact that I enjoy all these trappings—the airports, the smoke in my face, the humiliating dressing rooms. I like it. It means I'm a comic. People don't like the idea that comedians are happy. It doesn't seem fair that you could make a living like that and be happy off stage. If there are laughs on stage, they want tears on the pillow. I'm just a lucky fucker. I like what I do."

Seinfeld took a vacation once. He and a girlfriend went to Barbados for a week, drinking pineapple juice with a little umbrella in it. He hated it. "I guess it's great if you have a job you can't stand and you live in a place you don't like. For me, that kind of relaxation is a hairs-breadth away from stultifying boredom."

"I'll tell you something. I'd rather say something that people would quote as a great line that I said, that I thought of, than win an Oscar. Andy Warhol's line, about everyone's becoming famous for 15 minutes, is really just a joke, but it was such a great line it became part of the culture. I was in a car going from Philadelphia to New York, at one o'clock in the morning, listening to the radio. It was the postgame show for the Dodgers game when Kirk Gibson hit that homer. And the guy quoted me as he described what a great day in sports it had been. He said, 'It's like Jerry Seinfeld says, How are we ever going to impress our kids? What stories will we have? How can the world change that much again that we can blow kids away with stories like the ones our parents told us, about the war and the Depression, when milk was a nickel and cars were a quarter?' What will we say? When I was a boy, dogs didn't have the vote. They had no say in the world at all. In fact, we kept them on leashes.' When I heard that on the radio, that was the biggest boost I'd ever had. That, to me, is the coolest thing you could do on this planet."

...

Seinfeld sits quietly at the bar at Laffs, a comedy club in Tucson. In 10 minutes, he'll do the first of his two shows, but right now, Roseanne Barr is being interviewed on the TV set hanging overhead. A camera is panning across her cluttered living room, with its antiques and bric à brac. "You wouldn't get a shot like that in my house," says Seinfeld with a laugh. Barr is reciting the litany of her bizarre childhood woes—

being Jewish in Utah, getting hit by a car, ending up in the loony bin, being baptized as a Mormon—it's enough to fill a book.

Seinfeld's childhood is enough to fill a paragraph. His was a Long Island life, a quiet suburban existence with happy parents and happy children. The only unusual aspect of it was the fact that both parents had been raised without parents of their own, which gave them an independence they passed on to their two kids. Early on, Seinfeld became addicted to comics on TV—and to TV in general, for that matter. "Jerry was chained to the television," complains his mother, Betty. "At one point, I had to get rid of it. I couldn't stand it." It didn't work. He simply went next door to the neighbors' to get his fix. Looking back, one realizes that it wasn't wasted time. He talks in TV metaphors, makes jokes about both old and new TV shows and commercials and still harbors a desire to grow up to be Bud on Flipper.

**In stinging, sham-
ing fluorescent light,
heart racing, she
assesses herself,
pink clammy fingers
spread on pink dry
flesh.**

"I swear to God, I've learned most of what I know about life from TV," he says as the club manager taps him on the shoulder. It's time for Seinfeld to go from watching a comedian at work to being one.

His first show goes well. He has fans in Tucson—many from nearby University of Arizona—and they're an enthusiastic group. In fact, too many of them want to linger and chat, so Seinfeld has to take refuge in a dark, windowless cube that serves as an office. Dinner is brought to him while the staff readies the club for the next show. Seinfeld is perfectly at home eating a salad at a desk in semi-darkness while employees dash in and out, sticking cash into one of the desk drawers. Very little seems to bother him, except, perhaps, the review in the Times.

"You know," he says, "there are things in that review that I aspire to. Christon talked about revealing deeper truths and having social impact, and, yeah, I would love to say great things. Who wouldn't? I mean, these are my thoughts out there. So if they're

shallow, I'm shallow. But I don't think they're shallow. They may be light, but I don't think that they're shallow. I find that life is interesting on every level. I read a thing that Sam Kinison said the other day, about how it's tough to live his life so that he has something to talk about. The way I live, it's not a raw life. I have ambitions and disappointments, but I don't want to live a ragged, desperate existence just so I can talk about that. I don't want to necessarily make heavier observations, just better ones. I just want to be good."

It has been a long day, beginning with a seven A.M. trip to a local radio station to plug the club. It didn't do Seinfeld any good—his two shows were already sold out—but it helps give the smaller clubs visibility when the big names do promotion. He was on the air for a quick five minutes. When the disc jockey said, "Thanks for coming in," Seinfeld responded with an enthusiastic, if slightly sarcastic, "It was worth it." Then it was back to the hotel room to write. Toward noon, he went for a walk—"In the tall grass along the highway," he said—and ended up in a Jack in the Box, where he ordered a Chicken Supreme. Now he's a prisoner in a makeshift office as the second show crowd files in and orders its drinks.

That's a comic's life. One week, it's designer suits and *The Tonight Show*. The next, it's walking all alone in the tall grass in search of fast food.

"I really feel the key to having a successful career in comedy is never taking the bait of stardom per se. If you think you're a star, you're not a comedian anymore, because a comedian is one of us. Anyway, being a stand up is a grimy gig. A big star—well, short of an Eddie Murphy—you get up there and the audience will give you a free ride for five, maybe 10 minutes. That's it. If you're not funny that night, I don't care how famous you are. It doesn't matter. As long as I'm doing my stand up, the audience will keep me in my place. It keeps me from being a show-business asshole. Stardom can exist on its own, but laughs do not."

"Now that my career is moving up, I'm enjoying the perks, the hotel with the little extra sitting room, flying first class. But I still don't look like I belong in first class. People always eye me suspiciously. That's fine. I like that."

There's a knock on the door for the second show. "Well, back to the office," he says, putting on his jacket.

The next morning, the booker from the club shows up to give Seinfeld a ride to the airport. At the airport snack shop, Seinfeld shovels in two small boxes of Rice Krispies and one of shredded wheat and, like a seasoned traveler, is the last to board the Delta jet headed for L.A. He takes his place in the first class section—always a window in first class, an aisle in coach—looking out the window, reading *USA Today*, playing with his Sharp Wizard, as the flight attendant works her way down the aisle, offering champagne and orange juice and checking her manifest.

“

As long as I'm doing my stand-up, the audience will keep me in my place. It keeps me from being a show-business asshole.”



She gives me a drink and, true to his prediction, she's clearly puzzled by Seinfeld's presence. "Do you belong in coach?" she asks, glancing down her list. "I don't seem to have your name here."

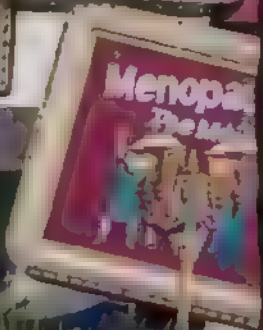
These are the moments that comedians live for, of course, when the joke is so obvious that nothing more need be said. While Seinfeld produces his ticket to mollify the flight attendant, he turns to me with a gigantic grin. He is, after all, one happy stand up comic.

From the August 1990 PLAYBOY



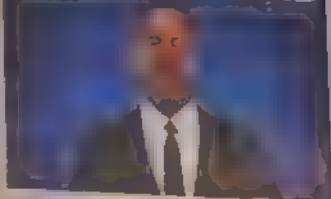
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CAESARS PALACE

with
JERRY SEINFELD



Hotel

THE COSMOPOLITAN



LAVINIA PALANITE







...sing her goals
and are



How was your experience shooting for Playboy? I am beyond excited about this experience that I had the opportunity to model for one of the biggest magazines in the world. And I thank you for this one more time.

Describe yourself in 3 words? Driven, goal achiever, and hard-working.

What's the best compliment someone can give you? That I am smart besides just being beautiful.

How can a guy catch your attention? Eyes are always catching attention, but he should know what to say too.

The Fitness Universe World Championship is coming up and we heard you'd be there. Can you tell us more about it and what you'll be doing? Yes! I am actually in prepping mode for it. I have some interesting outfits and routines that I will bring to the stage in Miami. One of the outfits will be with the Romanian flag colors and another with a lot of butterflies.

You've had some wins on the stage already. What have been some of your most memorable shows? Yes, in the middle of the pandemic I was competing in Destin for Miss Fashion Global where I got placed first runner up in the Fitness category. Last year I was in Miami for Miss Bikini US, representing Romania and got placed second runner-up. But the best thing I gained was the connections I created, and that's how I met one of my favorite photographers in the world, Robb, who took this Playboy photoshoot set!

You are incredibly fit. What is your personal workout routine like? Aww, thank you so much! When I am in season, I spend 3 hours a day at the gym. My workout is weights and cardio 6 days and one day just cardio and eating a very strict diet. Off-season I hate Cardio, ha ha! I just lift heavy and gain muscle. Romanian dishes are yummy and love them to eat that time of the year!

You've been known to walk the catwalk internationally. What are some of your most memorable runway moments? Who did you walk for and where? Last year, due to the pandemic, one spot happened to free up for the fashion show in Milano where I was walking for Michael Lombard. He is the first fashion designer sponsored by Monster Energy which happened around the world on his fashion tour. Michael Lombard signed with HarperPR which is the style fashion house to Lady Gaga, Beyonce, Nicki Minaj, Jennifer Lopez, and many other celebrities. Since working with him I have gone to Paris, and the Emirates Fashion Show which is known for the longest runway in the world. He is even opening his store in the Dubai Mall. At the moment though I am focusing on my fitness career, but I will be back to fashion shows next year.

When you were a child, what did you want to be when you grew up? A Victoria's Secret Angel was always my dream.

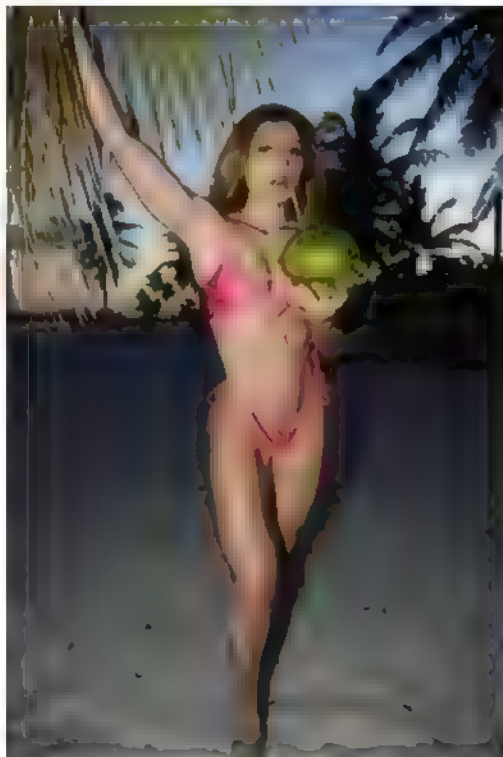
How did you start getting into modeling and what do you love about it? I got into modeling with the opportunity I had at Miss Bikini US and I am beyond grateful for that. The thing I love the most about modeling is the travel and the people I meet and the connections I get from it.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years? With my own fitness studio and a mother of a beautiful daughter that can support her in her dreams.

What are 3 things you can't live without? My cat, the gym, and traveling. By the way, I like a window seat on a plane in case somebody is thinking of Christmas shopping for me, haha.

Where are your favorite places that you have traveled to, where else would you like to visit one day and why? One of the best places I ever visited was Jordan, because of the history and amazing experience I had there! I recommend to everyone to visit it at least once in their life and sleep under the stars in the Wadi Rum deserts. I can't pick just one more place to travel, because my bucket list is pretty big. My next trip will probably be to Morocco.

Anything else you'd like to mention? Thank you to the whole team that made it happen, to Miss Bikini US for opening doors for me, Michael Lombard for having me on as a model, and to everyone who believed in me even when I didn't.











**Free the
Press, Presi-
dent Biden**



Independent reporters
are being penalized by
the Biden administra-
tion's new White House
entry policies that favor
wealthy corporate out-
lets. Plus, a translation
guide to the new press
secretary

WRITTEN BY BRIAN KAREM

At the end of Press Secretary Jen Psaki's Tuesday afternoon briefing, she was asked about her predecessor, Kayleigh McEnany, who just took a job as a Fox News contributor.

"Like many Americans, we disagree on political issues, but we talked about our families, our spouses, sports, all sorts of things in the green room, and I certainly wish her the best in her future endeavors," Psaki said.

Some felt it was classy of Psaki to stick to neutral niceties, a move few would have expected from the Trump administration had the roles been reversed. Others thought Psaki's full response, in which she mentioned knowing McEnany from when they both were occasional CNN contributors, was an example of how Washington, D.C. remains an insider's ball game.

I am not that cynical.

Of far more importance is how the current administration deals with the press. McEnany and the Trump administration were historically antagonistic and abusive toward reporters. All eyes have been on Biden and Psaki to improve that corroded relationship.

It hasn't gone as smoothly as one might expect. Last Friday Psaki announced that non press pool reporters and organizations who do not have seats in the briefing room will have to clear two hurdles just get onto the White House campus: win an entry lottery (limited to 80 reporters a day) and pay \$3,400.00 for a rapid Covid test (or supply evidence of a negative Covid test to the administration's satisfaction).

These restrictions punish independent reporters, foreign bureaus and freelancers, myself included. It is favoritism for the rich.

Members of the press pool (reporters from the richest media companies) will not have to pay for tests—the White House will continue to cover those costs. Because they're in the press pool, these reporters and the organizations they represent are guaranteed access to the White House, no matter the head count limit. So ultimately, these restrictions punish independent reporters, foreign bureaus and freelancers, myself included. It is favoritism for the rich.

On Tuesday the president announced, "We're now on track to have enough vaccine supply for every adult in America by the end of May." That's great news for the country, and should be great news for White House reporters too, right? Biden's statement motivated me to email Psaki some follow up questions. Will the White House assist non pool reporters in getting vaccinated? Will the restrictions on White House reporters be lifted by the end of May? Will the briefings open up to more reporters sooner than May?

Psaki wrote back quickly: "It means there will be greater access to vaccines for all Americans including reporters earlier than expected. That's good news. And in terms of the briefing room we rely on the advice of health and medical experts and will continue to do that on when we can expand the number of people safely in the room."

Of course, that doesn't answer my questions. I replied again, seeking follow up on whether the White House will provide Covid vaccines for all White House reporters so we can better serve the public. I also asked about another key detail: "No one has yet explained the metrics of easing restrictions at the White House. Can you? Please?"

As of my deadline I had received no response.

Last week I wrote about Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, who was murdered at the behest of Saudi prince Mohammed bin Salman. The question I was pounding the White House with at the time: Will there be any sanctions against Saudi Arabia for Khashoggi's murder? The answer, if you haven't heard yet, is still no. The murder occurred in 2018, when Trump was president and did nothing. Biden had promised to be tougher on Saudi Arabia, saying as a presidential candidate that he'd treat it like a "pariah." But he isn't.

Instead, America continues the same relationship it has had with Saudi Arabia. After all, the Saudis want to buy our weapons, and we like their

Freedom of press

We expected no response out of Trump. We expected better out of Biden.

oil—and the Saudi government didn't have a lot to do with 9/11 or the bombing of the U.S.S. Cole or other incidents of international terrorism. So the crown prince gets a free pass for murdering an innocent and important columnist who lived in Virginia and worked for an American newspaper.

We expected no response out of Trump. We expected better out of Biden.

Some accuse the press of being too soft on Biden's White House; others accuse us of being too rough. Those who believe we're too nice feel Psaki is kindly condescending; they point to how amicable the relationship is between her and the 14 reporters allowed in the briefing room, as well as to the numerous thank-yous interspersed throughout her briefings. Those who feel we're too hard on the new administration seem to think it's cruel to even take note of the few missteps the Biden communications team has made so far (see the T.J. Ducklo debacle, for example). "Give them a chance," some have shouted, or, "You want Trump back?"

Every administration should be held to the same standards. Nobody gets a nod just because they're not as horrendous as their predecessor. In Trump's case, a garden slug could crawl across that low bar.

In the spirit of fair treatment, let me offer a compendium of Psaki translations to better understand what she's saying in the briefing room, just as I did for McEnany.

When Press Secretary Jen Psaki says "interesting question," she means: I don't have an answer for this and really don't want to answer this question.

"With all due respect...." How many times do I have to repeat myself?

"Well, let me first say...." Get ready, I'm going to preach now. (Did I mention we're better than Trump?)

"I've not seen those reports"/"I'm not actually familiar with that." I'm out of the loop. Holy shit, I'm in over my head.

"We reserve the right to take further steps or additional actions." We haven't done anything yet.

"Let me circle back to you"/"I'm happy to follow up on X, Y or Z." I will mention the issue at a later time with a nonanswer that isn't a lie and won't provide you any news. Unlike Trump, I'm not going to get caught not responding to you.

"I'd encourage you to reach out to [insert name of other official] to better answer your question." Hey, idiot, I don't have the answers to everything.

"As the president has said...." I can read his press statement out loud, like any of you could. So there.

"We stand by X, Y or Z." I haven't directly answered this question and I stand by the nonanswer I previously gave.

"First of all, let's put this in context." I'm going to reference this in a manner that makes President Biden look good, no matter if it's in context or not.

"You may be aware of X, Y or Z, but others may not." Here's where I pretend everyone is a grade-school student who needs to be taught. Pull out your pencil and take notes.

"I am sure...but um...uh...and...uh..." What were we talking about again?

"We really aren't concerned about what the former president says." Christ, does the guy still get all the oxygen in the room? I mean seriously, we won the damn election!

"We'll leave that up to Congress." I ain't falling for this shit. Land mines ahead!

"We always need to keep communicating effectively." Listen up, you idiots! And also, by the way, in case I hadn't mentioned, we're better than Trump.

"Thank you, everyone," See, I'm nice. I didn't yell at you.

"I'm not going to make policy"/"I'm not going to get ahead of the president"/"I'm not going to speculate." Look, you're asking a stupid hypothetical question, and you should know better, you idiot.

"Well, look, we will work with so-and-so on a range of issues, and we look forward to doing that." Jesus, these idiots. If it's not the far right making my life difficult, it's the far left. Everybody, shut up!

"Our best option is..." All the options suck.

"Today we have a special guest." Now here's someone else who actually knows something. And, by the way, we're still better than Trump. Peace out!

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